25¢
PUBLISHED
TWICE
A MONTH
W

August 1st

Adventure

GORDON YOUNG • COMMANDER ELLSBERG • HUGH PENDEXTER

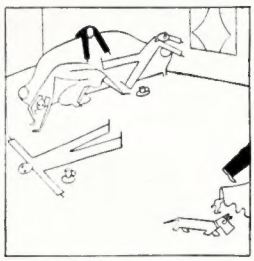
TALBOT MUNDY • GEORGES SURDEZ • WILLIAM CORCORAN

L. G. BLOCHMAN • FREDERICK HOPKINS • *and others*

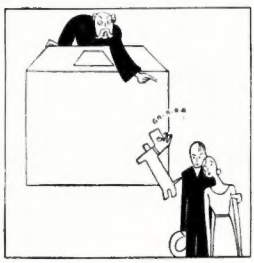
Avoid Mr. Blank's Terrible Plight!

Send the Coupon to-day!

Don't repeat the extenuating experience of Mr. Blank. Read this list and send your order. We'll rush the booklets if you add 25c for us to pay the postman to run.

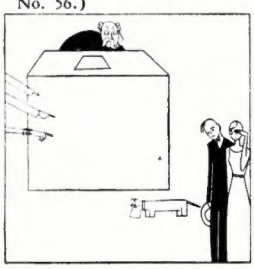


1 FOUR PEOPLE OVERCOME
Last seen at Mr. Blank's.



2 JUDGE ORDERS TRIAL

FIRST WITNESS: The dead silences were terrible. (Mr. Blank should have had No. 25.)
SECOND W.: Mr. Blank tucked his napkin under his chin. (No. 30 would have helped him.)
THIRD W.: The drinks were pale and wan. (No. 43 has swell recipes.)
FOURTH W.: Mr. Blank's dog tried to kiss me! (Quick get No. 56.)



3 JUDGE RULES GUESTS WERE OVERCOME WITH EXTREME BOREDOM. MR. BLANK SENTENCED TO SOCIAL OSTRACISM.

4 Mrs. BLANK — or his sister —DISCOVERS AND CLIPS DELINEATOR COUPON.
Rah for the Little Woman!

FUN

25..FIVE MINUTE PLAYS.....25c
Ice-breakers that get any party off to a good start.

67..TEN MINUTE PLAYS.....25c
More ice-breakers. Also a double wedding for one person.

51..GAMES FOR GROWN UPS.15c
To overcome dead silences. Good for all ages.

21..FIVE WAYS TO TELL FORTUNES 15c
With tea leaves, cards, letters, and smoke. Harmless and helpful.

27..WHAT'S IN YOUR NAME?..15c
Whom you should marry, your vocation, and other hidden points about your name.

46..SECRETS OF HANDWRITING 10c
What the dashing signature reveals, amusing parlor pastime.

MANNERS

30..GOOD TABLE MANNERS...15c
Read this and you'll be asked to more parties. (And you won't tuck your napkin under your chin!)

FOOD

43..BEVERAGES FOR PARTIES...10c
How to mix a horse's neck, silver fizz, and other nice things.

63..HORS D'OEUVRES AND CANAPES 15c
These make any drink taste better. Simple enough for a man to make.

41..SALADS FOR ALL OCCASIONS 10c
A change from the inevitable tomato and lettuce. Appetizing.

47..HOW TO GIVE A BRIDGE PARTY 10c
Refreshments that take your mind off a bad hand.

26..PARTY SANDWICHES.....10c
Something new for all kinds of parties. 82 recipes.

60..HOW TO ENTERTAIN 6 and 8.25c
Give this to your wife the next time the boss comes. You'll get a raise.

DOGS

56..DOGS 10c
What kind of a dog have you? You'll find a chapter on all important breeds as well as care, training, registration.

. . . . . COUPON . . . . .

DELINEATOR INSTITUTE
161 Sixth Ave., New York

Please send me booklets encircled:

25..25c	46..10c	47..10c
67..25c	30..15c	26..10c
51..15c	43..10c	60..25c
21..15c	63..15c	56..10c
27..15c	41..10c	Rush 25c

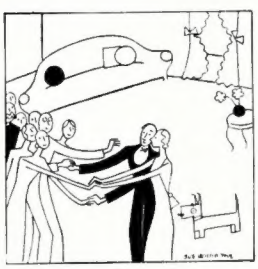
I enclose check ☐ stamps ☐ money order ☐

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY .....State .....

5 Mr. BLANK PROCLAIMED SOCIAL LION. MORAL: AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION—and a Delineator Coupon—need we say more!



"The Name . . . DRAKE . . . has become a veritable synonym for . . . comfort"

—Meredith Nicholson

THE DRAKE is dedicated to . . . Comfort. Services without end alertly attend your wants with ease and dispatch. Living quarters are generously proportioned. Furnishings are obviously selected with care. THE DRAKE menus are such as are attempted only by chefs of unusual skill. Plainly you will see . . . why travelers of note are inspired to speak of THE DRAKE in terms of. . . Comfort.

The
DRAKE
Hotel · Chicago

RATES BEGIN AT $4.00 PER DAY FOR SINGLE ROOM WITH BATH

Free Mailing Lists

Will help you increase sales
Send for FREE catalog giving counts and prices on thousands of classified names of your best prospective customers--National, State and Local--Individuals, Professions, Business Concerns.

99% Guaranteed by refund of 5¢ each

ROSS-Gould Co. 313 N. 10th St. St. Louis

$6.85 Flint Lock Pistols

for use or decoration. Brass trimmed, in working order, with flint. $6.85 each. Large stock antique guns, swords, spears, etc.
1931 catalog, 364 pages of pistols, armor, guns, daggers, etc., mailed for 50 cents. New special circular for 2c stamp.
Established 1865.
Francis Bannerman Sons, 501 B'way, N. Y. City

WANTED—OLD GOLD, DIAMONDS

Mail us your old gold teeth—old or broken jewelry—antiques—watches—diamonds—silver. Cash by return mail. Goods returned in 10 days if you're not satisfied.
OHIO SMELTING CO., 315-C Hippodrome Bldg., Cleveland, O.

EARN MONEY AT HOME

YOU can make $15 to $50 weekly, in spare or full time at home coloring photographs. No experience needed. No canvassing. We instruct you by our new simple Photo-Color process and supply you with work. Write for particulars and Free Book to-day.
The IRVING-VANCE COMPANY Ltd.
364 Hart Building, Toronto, Can.

LAW STUDY AT HOME

Legally trained men win high positions and big success in business and public life. Be independent. Greater opportunities now than ever before. Big corporations are headed by men with legal training. Earn
$5,000 to $10,000 Annually
We guide you step by step. You can train at home during spare time. Degree of LL. B. conferred. Successful graduates in every section of the United States. We furnish all text material, including fourteen-volume Law Library. Low cost, easy terms. Get our valuable 64-page "Law Guide" and "Evidence" books FREE. Send for them NOW.
LaSalle Extension University, Dept. 8367-L, Chicago
The World's Largest Business Training Institution

The BREAKERS

On the Ocean Front
At New Jersey Avenue
Atlantic City, N. J.

Extraordinary Reduction in Rates
As low as

$6 With Meals Daily per Person Without Meals $3

Hot and Cold Sea Water in all Baths
Complete Garage Facilities

EMANUEL E. KATZ, *Managing Director*

Orders - Inquiries

Can be Secured by MAIL

POLK'S REFERENCE BOOK and Mailing List Catalog

Gives counts and prices on over 8,000 different lines of business. No matter what your business, in this book you will find the number of your prospective customers listed.
Valuable information is also given as to how you can use the mails to secure orders and inquiries for your products or services.

Write for Your FREE Copy
R. L. POLK & CO., Detroit, Mich.
Largest City Directory Publishers in the World
Mailing List Compilers—Business Statistics
Producers of Direct Mail Advertising

DEAFNESS IS MISERY

Many people with defective hearing and Head Noises enjoy conversation, go to Theatre and Church because they use Leonard Invisible Ear Drums which resemble Tiny Megaphones fitting in the Ear entirely out of sight. No wires, batteries or head piece. They are inexpensive. Write for booklet and sworn statement of the inventor who was himself deaf.

A. O. LEONARD, Inc., Suite 996, 70 5th Ave., New York

REX RABBITS Raise them for us. We pay up to $12 each for all you raise. Send 25c for full information and contract. Everything explained. Send at once and find out about this big proposition. Make this a profitable year.
MAKE GOOD MONEY!
THE EASTERN RABBITRY
Route 1, Box 274 New Freedom, Pa.

SKINS
SHOULD INTEREST
MEN!

This isn't a sermon, but a little helpful advice. Don't pay any attention to it, if you don't want to, but if you want to bowl over the woman of your dreams, give a thought to your complexion. If it reveals even one blackhead or unsightly pimple she won't think you're the swell movie hero she sees on the screen! Get these booklets and learn the facts about skins!

3..SKIN LIKE SILK.....25c
Meant for women, but men can catch the cures for acne, blackheads, pimples and so on.

52..CARE OF THE FEET.....10c
Read this and you can dance all evening. Of course, sitting out has its merits, but don't acknowledge that the good old feet hurt.

5..EATING TO GAIN OR LOSE WEIGHT..25c
Taming the unruly waistline without hardship. Makes you more attractive to the fair and discriminating sex.

4..REDUCING IN SPOTS.....15c
If you don't go to a gymnasium, get this book. You can practice with the radio.

15..WHAT TO EAT.....15c
Talk glibly of vitamins and minerals—it raises your par value.

• • **COUPON** • •

DELINEATOR INSTITUTE,
161 Sixth Ave., N. Y. C.

I know these booklets are meant for women, but I want to know what it's all about. Send me

3..25c	4..15c
52..10c	15..15c
5..25c	Rush 25c

I enclose check ☐ stamps ☐ money order ☐ for

NAME .....

ADDRESS.....

CITY.....STATE.....

(Your inquiry will be held in strict confidence.)

ADVENTURE August 1st, 1932 Published twice a month by The Butterick Publishing Company, Butterick Building, New York, N. Y. Yearly subscription $4.00 in advance; single copy 25 cents. Entered as second-class matter Oct. 1, 1910, at the post-office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879. Additional entry at Chicago, Illinois. Volume 83 Number 4

Adventure
(Registered U. S. Patent Office)

CONTENTS

1932
VOL. LXXXIII No. 4

for August 1st

A. A. Proctor
EDITOR

The Gambler . . . . . GORDON YOUNG 2
A Story of the Forty-Niners

Navy Cross . . . . . COMMANDER EDWARD ELLSBERG 12
A True Story of Deep Sea Diving

The Saga of The Sixshooter
(*I—Pistols*) . . . . . CARL ELMO FREEMAN 24

White Tigers . . . . . TALBOT MUNDY 26
A Story of India. Two Parts—I

Pots . . . . . T. R. ELLIS 53
A Story of the Speedway

The Tropical Tramp . . . . CLIFF MOSIER 66
A Story of Central America

A Perfect Target . . . . . L. G. BLOCHMAN 70
A Story of Japan

Justice And A Prizefighter . . JAMES W. BENNETT 81

The Red Traps. . . . . HUGH PENDEXTER 84
A Novel of Old Indian Days Three Parts—Conclusion

An Alibi For Blood . . . . WILLIAM CORCORAN 110
A Novelette of Metropolitan Crime

Riders (*A Poem*) . . . . . R. E. ALEXANDER 156

The Kahuna . . . . . FREDERICK HOPKINS 158
A Story of the South Seas

Cold Steel . . . . . GEORGES SURDEZ 170
A Story of the Foreign Legion

The Camp-Fire 182 Ask Adventure 187 Trail Ahead 192

Cover Design by Gerard C. Delano *Headings by Harry Townsend*

Published twice a month by The Butterick Publishing Company, Butterick Building, New York, N.Y., U.S.A. Joseph A. Moore, Chairman of the Board; S. R. Latshaw, President; W. C. Evans, Secretary; Fred Lewis, Treasurer; A. A. Proctor, Editor. Entered as Second Class Matter, October 1, 1910, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Additional entry at Chicago, Illinois. Yearly subscription $4.00 in advance. Single copy, Twenty-five Cents. Foreign postage, $2.00 additional. Trade Mark Registered; Copyright, 1932, by The Butterick Publishing Company in the United States and Great Britain.

A Story of the Days of '49

The GAMBLER

By GORDON YOUNG

ON A Sunday afternoon in the late Summer of '49, a tall, pale man on a lop-eared mule rode up the steep river trail and entered Samson's camp—called Samson's because a Yankee by that name had a leaky tent, with the front wide open to the weather, which was a sort of general store, its rough hewn planks across pine stakes driven into the ground for bar and counter. A wagon could not get within twenty miles of Samson's. All goods were packed over the rocky winding trail, and merchandise in Samson's was priced accordingly.

There were two roughly made tables, covered with broken oilcloth, in the tent. The legs of the tables were driven into the ground. The only seats were cracker boxes and chunks of logs.

Samson was a rawboned man, nasal, shrewd, full of complaining about hard times; nevertheless, he gave credit on everything but whisky and certain canned goods. He had about six thousand dollars, cold money, invested in the skimpy stores under his leaky tent—a few boxes of tobacco, some tinned stuff, a mere handful of potatoes, some rice, beans, bacon, a few shovels and picks, and a half dozen tin wash basins that sold for twelve dollars, dust, each.

Since it was Sunday when the tall, pale man on the lop-eared mule rode into camp, miners from up and down the river were loafing there. Sunday was a day on which to get drunk, mend pants, swap yarns, wrestle and play poker. All were bearded; but only one man had the faintest touch of gray in his hair, and men called him Dad, sometimes Gran-'dad. He was a bowed, kindly sort of man, not strong, not lucky, and in debt to Samson for beans, bacon and flour. He didn't drink or gamble and wouldn't talk about women. He carried a book in his pocket, would quit work any time to visit a sick man, and wrote letters home for such as had never gone to school.

The miners eyed the stranger on the lop-eared mule.

"Gambler." The word passed with nodding appraisal.

"Samson's gittin' to be some punkins when a real gambler comes!"

"You bet!"

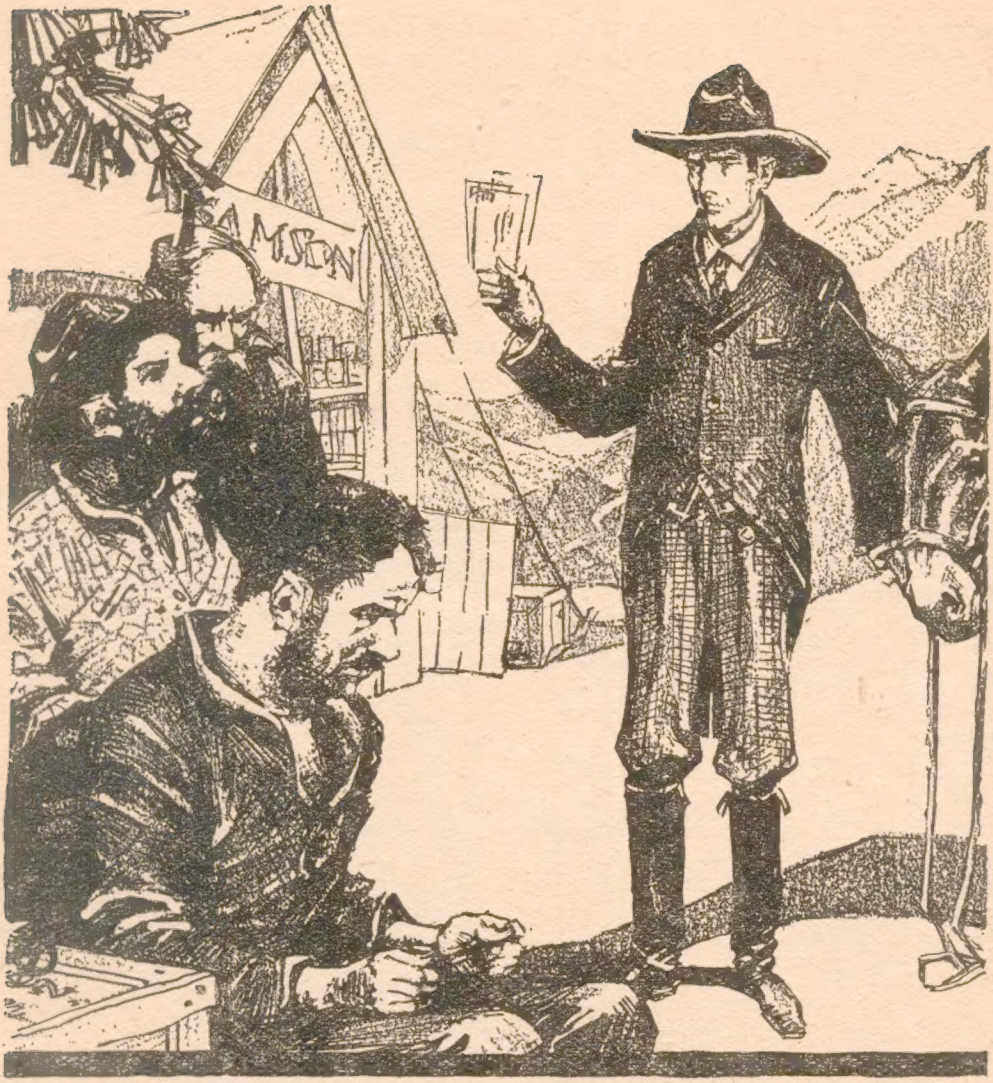
"Looks sort o' sickly."

"All gamblers does."

"Shore do."

"Black Dan 's allus darin' folks to take his bets. Maybe now somebody will."

Men made cautious sounds of "Huh!" and looked a little uncomfortable at mention of Black Dan. The miners of Samson's were honest, hard-working, peaceable men. Black Dan was lucky at



mining or gambling, wore a long knife, a big revolver, and had an evil temper. All men carried revolvers, but Dan had killed a stranger and talked big of how he would kill anybody else who needed killing.

The man stopped his mule.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen."

His voice was husky and low. His face was very thin and pinched. His skin looked like parchment drawn over a skull. He coughed, struggling to hold back the coughing, then drew a silk handkerchief from an inside coat pocket and wiped his lips. He glanced staringly at the handkerchief as he took it from his mouth.

He dismounted slowly, brushed at his black coat, shaking off the dust. He lifted his hat, pushing the thin, long hair back over his bony head, wiped his forehead and his neck. He tucked the handkerchief out of sight and inquired—

"This is Samson's camp, I believe?"

"Shore is!"

"Ye're right."

"This is her."

There was pride in the answers, as if

Samson's were deservedly the most famous of all camps.

The mule bent its head in a lazy nibble at dried grass. The gambler pulled gently at the bridle, ran his fingers down along the mule's nose, petting it. He untied a canvas bag from the back of the saddle, almost letting it fall, as if the weight were too much for him. He began to work with the cinch, but coughed, paused, wiped his mouth with the silk handkerchief and peered at the folds. There were traces of blood, very bright. The gambler eyed the blood spots as if inscrutably waiting for something. Doctors had told him that another hemorrhage would mean death. He wiped his mouth again, looked at the handkerchief. The bleeding had stopped. Again he tugged at the cinch.

"Here, pard," said a brawny young man with child-like blue eyes, "I ain't much of a hand with hosses, but—"

"Thank you," said the gambler with dignity.

The young man lifted off the saddle. "There you are!"

The gambler untied a coiled rope, put it about the mule's neck, took off the bridle and stood for a moment, glancing about to select the best grass.

"Here." The young man put out his hand. "I'll take him down the hill a piece. Good grass there. Ain't been all tromped down like around here."

"And may I ask to whom I am obliged?" the gambler inquired with dignity and gratefulness.

"Huh? You mean me? Shucks, jus' Joe. Young Joe. Him there—" pointing —"that ol' ugly piece o' meat an' bone, he's a Joe too. Makes me 'shamed o' myself for to have the same name. My folks never knowed what ugliness could be or—"

"Er they 'd a-drowned you like a blin' pup!" said the older Joe, imperturbably amused, as he whittled on a sappy piece of white pine.

Men laughed, Young Joe loud and good naturedly, slapping his thigh. He was still laughing as he led off the mule.

The gambler looked about, his dark eyes passing quickly, as if in appraisal, over each face.

The lounging men thought he looked as a proper gambler ought to look, being tall and pale, with black hat and coat, a nice store shirt, checkered trousers and shiny boots. They would have resented the coming of any one but a gambler in such a fancy rig.

"Gentlemen, when I stopped at Sure-Fire Crossroads, the storekeeper there said he had some letters for parties up here. So I paid the charges and—"

The cry of *gold!* had never stirred them, and never would, as did the word *letters*. They came off their block seats, off the ground, with a trampling rush and crowded in close about the gambler.

"I regret to say, gentlemen, that there must be much disappointment among you because there are only three letters."

Some men turned aside, almost as if slinking. Others, without hope, waited, eager to see letters passed out, anybody's letters. Dad, groping absently to get the book into his hip pocket, pressed against the men, trying to get in close.

THE gambler took the letters from his pocket. Even men who couldn't read pushed to glimpse the address.

"Mr. Frank Monroe." The gambler read the name in a calm, husky voice and looked up.

Men stared, one from another, each inquiring of the other. At last some one ventured doubtfully—

"Never heard of 'im."

"Samson, you ever hear of a Frank Monroe?"

Samson reflected studiously, scratched his chin, shook his uncombed head—

"No, can't say as I hev."

"Gosh!" said the older Joe. "I'd give a hun'red dollar f'r my name to be his'n."

The gambler looked at the letter. The charges were penciled there. Three dollars. He gave the letter to Samson.

"Perhaps Mr. Monroe may come. If

I am still in camp you may collect the charges. If I have departed"—the gambler coughed, wiped his lips, looked at the handkerchief—"the charges will not matter. The next letter is addressed to Mr. Thomas Robinson."

Again there was a hush, but unlike the other. Again men stared at one another, shook their heads with a kind of sad whispering.

"By gory!" said Samson. "Tom Rob'son was the name o' thet thar man Black Dan kilt in the poker game."

"Yeah, 'cused him o' cheatin'."

"Maybe he was. I dunno."

"Ye're allus cheatin' if you beat Dan in a big pot!"

The gambler listened observantly, but said nothing. He returned the letter to his pocket. The penciled charges in the corner were four and a half dollars. It cost money to have letters delivered in the camps of '49.

But one letter remained. It was like the last chance in a big lottery.

"For Mr. Richard Thurston," said the gambler.

"Never heerd o' him neither," Samson croaked at once.

"You have, too! It is for me. That is my name." Dad, for once assertive, pushed at men and reached out tremblingly.

"To think ol' Gran'dad has got 'im a real name!" said a wag, not unkindly. No one laughed. Getting letters was almost the only sacred matter to men who had few notions about the sacredness of anything.

Dad seized the letter in much the same way as a starving man snatches food. His fingers pried at the seal. The penciled charges were three dollars and a quarter.

"I haven't three dollars!" Dad gasped.

A half dozen arms swung pocketward, pulling at pouches. Words flashed, each trying to be first.

"I've got it!"

"Here, Dad."

"I'll pay."

"Gosh awmighty, here!"

The gambler moved his hand expressively:

"When you do happen to have it, Mr. Thurston. I hope to be in your camp for many—" he paused as if to choose an unextravagant hope—"weeks."

Men enviously watched Dad withdraw down the hillside, reading his letter as he walked along.

"Come on," a voice shouted. "Seven up f'r drinks! Who's on?"

The miners pushed stumblingly into the tent and scrambled like bad mannered, good natured children for seats at the tables. They gathered at the bar. Samson's tin cups clanked on the rough hewn board, his fingers and thumb dipped into open pouches. The gambler sat alone on a box outside. He wiped his forehead and neck and breathed hard as if mere breathing were work.

Young Joe came striding buoyantly up the hillside.

"My good gosh, what's happened to Dad? He's moseyin' along down there, cryin' like a woman. 'F anybody's hurt Dad's feelin's I'll break their damn neck!"

"He has received a letter from home," said the gambler.

"Oh." Joe sat down, nodded. "It nearly allus knocks a feller over—letter from home. Yes, sir."

"Home?" said the gambler simply and looked at the ground.

"Home," Young Joe repeated, nodding, and also stared at the ground.

Presently the gambler asked in his calm, dignified way—

"I wonder if there is any place where I can get lodging?"

"You bet! If you can stan' my cookin'. I ain't no great shakes of a cook, as Dad c'n tell you. He's livin' with me. Me, I was born in the woods. All these pines made me hone to heave an ax. I built a cabin. My two pards skedaddled. One said he was goin' home if he had to swim. Other 'n got rheumatics from workin' in the river an' lit out f'r San Francisco. So I took Dad in. Queer

cuss, Dad. Powerful awkerd with tools. I can't read ner write a lick. An' Dad can't even chop kindlin' without nickin' his boot. If eddycation 's that useless, I ort to be glad I ain't got none."

"I shall be glad to stop with you". The gambler drew his pouch, weighed it carefully. "I am sure," he said, though the pouch was rather lean, "that I have more than enough here to pay my expenses as long as I—I remain."

THAT night, being urged, the gambler played a little poker in Samson's. Men were eager but cautious about his game. Yet they noticed critically that the gambler did not hold big hands, and often won the most pumpkin seed by bluffing. They noticed, too, that the joints of his long white fingers were a little stiff.

Scraps of conversation could be overheard in the poker game as Young Joe tried to coax Samson into parting, on credit, with certain tinned luxuries.

"He's goin' to stop with me. An' his stomick ain't strong," Joe urged.

"Naw, Joe," said the nasal Samson, "you done me outa them peaches awhile back when ol' Dad was ailin'. You shore hev bad luck with your pards."

"Don't say nothin' agin my pards. They're mine!"

"Thet don't keep 'em from bein' sickly. Naw, Joe, I'll let ye hev beans an' bacon. You're a good boy, but ye dew owe me risin' up'ard o' fifty dollars. But them cans, they 're special."

"Then give me some beans that ain't wormy. I prefer to put in my own flavorin'."

When the last miner, thinking of tomorrow's work hip-deep in icy water, went his way—not always with a steady gait, for Samson's liquor was powerful—the gambler said to the storekeeper—

"I believe that I overheard you say that my young friend owes you —"

"Fifty-six dollars. You bet."

The gambler offered his pouch.

"We will also take a few cans of the tinned milk you refused him on credit."

"I on'y got seven left. Five dollars apiece."

"Why you damned ol' robber, you," said Joe. "You been sellin' 'em three apiece."

"Prices has riz, Joe."

"You bet they has, you ol' robber! I bet when you die you'll sell your coffin to the devil for kindlin'."

Joe, with a lumpy sack of canned stuff, beans and bacon over his shoulder, led the way to his cabin; and though downhill, the gambler stopped often for breath.

It was a small cabin with a huge fireplace, three wall bunks, dirt floor, three-legged stools and a table.

Dad was already in bed and pretended to be asleep. The gambler, who was wakeful through the night, could tell when Dad was really sleeping by the way he sighed in his dreams. Joe snored away soundly.

For days the gambler scarcely stirred from the cabin. At noon he would move a stool into the sunlight and sit reflectively, coughing, wiping his lips, looking at the red stains, waiting to see if the hemorrhage followed. All he ate was a little watered milk and softened crusts of Joe's bread, baked in ashes. Joe would try to arouse the gambler's appetite by smacking his lips over the big pot of beans.

Dad with a kind of glum determination was working hard on his river claim. He had run into a faint streak of pay dirt that brought him a little dust and much hope; and he was very like a trustful miser with the gold he panned. Each night he proudly showed Joe and the gambler how much he had got through the day; he wouldn't pinch into it except for necessities, but left the pouch lying under his pillow while at work. Joe and the gambler connived together in lying about the cost of food, so Dad had the feeling that he really paid his full share.

"Some day maybe he'll show you the picture of his fam'ly," said Joe.

FAR back in the hills there was a torrential rain. The river rose, swelling high over the sands. The claims could not be worked. And one night Dad, always clumsy, fell on the wet hillside and broke his right arm.

"I got me a horsepital," said Joe proudly.

It was tedious for the three of them in the cabin, doing nothing day after day. Joe whittled spoons out of soft pine. Dad read aloud from his book, by Shakespeare; but Dad's voice was as sad as if his heart had died. Joe frankly did not understand "that Shakespeare sort o' talk", but the gambler listened attentively.

The gambler, as if to do his part in offering entertainment, tried to do card tricks, but the joints of his long fingers were puffed and not nimble.

"This seems about the only one left that I can do," he said, and picked up two cards, one in each hand, in such a way that Joe thought they were two aces of the same suit. Dad, keener of mind, saw that the forefingers of the gambler's long hands lay along the top of the cards, his thumbs at the bottom. Both cards seemed at a casual glance to be aces; but one was the trey with top and bottom spots, and pip numerals concealed.

"I'm damned!" said the mystified Joe. "Looks like you could rub the spots off 'em."

One day while Joe was up at Samson's, Dad said to the gambler:

"There is a man going to San Francisco who will take a letter for me, but I can't write with this arm broken. Will you write for me? It is to her."

He took an old wallet from under his bunk and removed a picture of a sweet faced woman with two young girls.

"I wanted them to have what money would buy. Trips to Europe and a fine house. I was teaching school and came to California. Took all our savings. She wrote me that the school board said I could have my old place back again if I got home before the first of the year. I'll have to tell her there isn't much chance. It would take five hundred dollars just to get home."

The gambler sat with pencil and tablet on his knee, waiting with inscrutable attention, glancing sidelong at the picture of the wife and two children who waited prayerfully for the return of Mr. Richard Thurston.

"My Lord, and to think when I was coming to California I had the notion that I would walk along and pick up chunks of gold! And I am supposed to be an intelligent man."

"I understand," said the gambler. "Only a few days ago I thought that if I could get to the air up here in the hills I would be all right. Find something more precious than gold. I was a fool. In San Francisco I could have had the food and comforts that make dying a little easier."

"Oh, but you are a long way from dying." Dad tried to appear hopeful.

"No chance for me to see Christmas."

"Christmas!" Dad echoed sadly. "What can Christmas be like in these hills. But at home—Christmas!" He pointed vaguely toward his bunk. "I've about ten ounces in my pouch up there. About $150. And this arm. And I owe Joe—I don't know how much. As well dream of fifty thousand, as I used to do when I was coming to California. If I started now I could just about get home by Christmas."

Dad dictated his letter, saying brave things, calling his broken arm a "sprained wrist", and offering false hope of the gold he would find next Spring when the river went down so the miners could work their claims again.

The gambler gave him the sheets of the letter.

"Why," said Dad, "your writing is better than mine. You are an educated man."

"I fear neither of us is. An educated man is one who has learned wisdom in time for it to be of some benefit."

Dad took his letter and went out to

find the man who had promised to carry it to San Francisco.

When left alone, the gambler drew his lean pouch and felt of the dust that had settled in the bottom. His expert fingers knew by the feel to within a half ounce of how much the dust in any bag was worth.

"I'll have to hurry and die," he thought, "or Joe will have a pauper on his hands. All I need to do is to climb that hill, just once, and the next day I will have the hemorrhage." He brooded for a time, then muttered aloud, "Five hundred!" He smiled faintly, and shook his head in vague regret. Many were the times that he had indifferently seen five hundred and more dollars hang on the turn of a card. "Christmas." His pale, parchment-like face remained inscrutable.

Joe came in triumphantly, holding out a can of lobster.

"I thought maybe you'd like some. Samson's only can!"

Joe's generous idea of what was good for a sick man was whatever cost the most money. He clapped it on the table proudly.

"Black Dan's up to the store, gettin' drunk an' wantin' folks to bet. My gosh, but that feller is lucky. Nobody can beat 'im—an' mostly men are scairt he'll shoot if they do. He's a powerful mean cuss."

Joe went out to chop kindling, build a fire and heat the lobster.

It was almost dark. The gambler sat in the dimness of the cabin and staringly watched the darkness grow dense. He felt of his puffed finger joints. He felt of his nearly empty pouch. In the darkness he lifted his eyes toward the top bunk, staring intently.

The gambler arose and stood listening. Joe was whistling. His ax struck from time to time. The gambler moved forward and, with stealthy outreaching arm, groped at the head of Dad's bunk. He could not quite touch what he wanted. He raised himself, standing up on the edge of the lowest bunk. Joe had stopped chopping, stopped whistling. He was gathering the kindling into his arms. The gambler gropingly felt about, grasped something, stepped down. Hastily he shoved Dad's pouch inside his own.

The exertion brought on a coughing spell.

"Gosh, I hate to hear you doin' that!" said Joe helplessly.

He threw the kindling with bouncing clatter on the hearth, lighted a candle and stood by, sadly staring as the gambler coughed rackingly. After a time the gambler lay down, gasping.

"Wouldn't you like some lobster? Oughter be good for you!"

"No, Joe, thank you."

"Gosh," said Joe, eyeing the rusty can. "Well, maybe Dad would."

Dad came in, looking blue, trying not to show it.

"I was up to the camp. Black Dan is on another tear."

The gambler continued to lie on the bunk while Dad and Joe ate supper. Joe chewed on the lobster and felt cheated.

"Tough as mule meat. Me, I'll stick to beans, by gosh!"

Dad took his book, moved the stool so that the firelight danced across his shoulder, and read, forgetful of his troubles in the magic of the poet's words.

The gambler arose weakly.

"Joe, open my valise, will you, please. I think there is one clean shirt left."

"What the hell you want with a clean shirt this time o' night!"

"I thought I would like to go up to the camp a little while."

"You'd better think some more. Stayin' in bed is what you wanta do."

Nevertheless, Joe opened the canvas bag. The gambler took out a mirror and a razor. Joe gave him warm water from the pot beside the fire. The gambler shaved with delicate touch of fingertips feeling about his face, all the while breathing as if it were hard work. He put on his clean shirt, carefully tied his black tie and got out the blacking and

brush for his boots. Joe, without being asked, shined them.

"Whatever on earth's got into you?" Joe protested as the gambler carefully combed his hair, touched his tie, rubbed the black nap of his tall hat and placed it on his head. "You act like you was goin' to see a girl."

"Soon I am, Joe. A dark and beautiful lady who takes all weary men to her breast and lets them lie in peace."

Joe frowned, mystified; but Dad gave a startled look.

"I may need you to give me a little help up the hill, Joe."

"Shore I'm goin'. You can't walk no half mile uphill alone. You comin' too, Dad?"

Dad moved his book, looked up, ready to come if they thought he should; but the gambler said:

"Dad will stay here. And wait up for us, Dad. Don't go to bed until we return." As he spoke the gambler rubbed his swollen joints and glanced toward the top bunk. "Don't go to bed!" he commanded enigmatically.

THE gambler walked slowly, leaning on Joe's arm.

"Joe, Dad has a wife and two girls—"

"I know."

"They want him to come home."

"I know. Takes five hundred dollars 'r more. Wisht I had it."

"Joe, tonight I am going to try to win it from this man Black Dan."

"Don't try it! He's a mean cuss."

"Joe, I've been thinking things. And tonight I feel lucky. You see, Joe, I have never believed in God. But I do believe that if there is a God he will choose wisely between Black Dan's need of money and Dad's."

"Well, I shore b'lieve in God," said Joe with conviction. "But I don't reckon God pays much attention to poker games. More 'n the devil's line. An' Dan 'll raise the devil if he loses."

Not many people were in Samson's, but Black Dan was there—a big shaggy fellow with knife and gun at his belt and a mean, bullying look in his eyes. His boots were muddy, his red shirt muddy. He was bareheaded and his thick curly hair fell about his head in a greasy tangle.

Men looked with curious interest at the gambler, who was much paler and more sickly than when they had first seen him ride into camp on the lop-eared mule.

"Good evening, gentlemen," he said huskily in his dignified way, and sat down at a table. Young Joe sat down too.

Black Dan glowered, a little hurt in pride that the gambler had glanced at him without interest. He emptied the tin cup down his throat and, lurching, went to the table where the gambler, drawing a deck of cards from one pocket, a handful of pumpkin seeds from the other, began to deal stud poker.

Men circled near, looking on. Black Dan peered owlishly. As the gambler began to deal the second hand, Black Dan thumped the table with his fist.

"Here, feller, deal me in! Gamblers is my meat. An' if I find any crooked work I cut their hearts out an' bite off a chunk." He glowered about him. "Ain't that right, fellers?"

"Shore, oh shore!" said a man or two appeasingly.

Dan dropped a heavy pouch to the table, thumped the table with it, then demanded—

"Let me see some o' your dust, feller."

The gambler, not speaking, calmly drew his pouch. It was long and looked full. Joe eyed this bulging pouch with surprise. He thought it full of dust, knew that if so its value was much more than $500. The gambler handled it as if it were weighty, placed it near his elbow and began to deal.

Joe had a weakness for gambling, was determined to play cautiously, felt maybe he might win a little and "loan" it to Dad. Two other men put pouches before them and tapped the table, asking for cards.

Pumpkin seeds were the chips, ten to the ounce. Black Dan bet crazily, running people out of pots, and laughed. He did not have to bluff. His luck was amazing.

"That's how I fix city gamblers!" he said boisterously, gathering in the pot.

The gambler continued to deal. His fingers were stiff, almost clumsy. Dan watched him suspiciously.

"I don't give no warnin'—I kill!" he said proudly.

At that the gambler lifted his glance, paused in the dealing, just stared, saying nothing. Black Dan uneasily turned his head and spat, then took another chew of tobacco.

Joe was toying with pumpkin seeds. One flipped away and fell behind the gambler's pouch. Joe leaned forward and pushed the pouch to get it. He expected the full weight of gold dust, but this pouch had very little weight. He took back his seed and sat silent, feeling vaguely afraid.

The cards fell on a new deal. Joe peered with lingering interest at his first card, and was content. A good card.

At the fall of the second card around, Black Dan had a king in sight, but the gambler had the ace of spades. The gambler bet his ace. Dan raised him. Joe looked hungrily at the gambler's ace. Joe's second card had not helped him, and he felt the betting was too heavy for the risk. He fiddled indecisively with the cards for a moment, then pushed them away from him toward the center of the table, withdrawing from the pot. He had had a good card in the hole. He still eyed that good card after he had pushed it away, face down.

Black Dan raised the bet. Then for the first time that night the gambler took a second look at his hole card.

"Fine gambler you are!" said Black Dan. "Can't remember your hole card. Me, I've got a pair o' kings, back to back. But you'll have to pay like hell to see 'em."

At that the gambler, without a word, saw and raised the pot again.

Dan came back as if angered that anybody would presume to raise his bets. All the other men had, like Joe, dropped out.

On the next round Dan drew the ace of diamonds, the gambler merely a ten spot. Dan's ace-king bet. The gambler stayed.

On the fourth round the gambler drew an ace of hearts, but Dan got a king. The gambler bet his pair of aces, bet them hard. Dan laughed and raised. The gambler hesitated, touched his pouch as if appraisingly, then saw the raise—and raised.

Dan swore.

"I've got three kings," he said, glowering. "If you've got three aces, I'll know there's been crooked work, by God!"

The gambler peered at him steadily, not speaking, just waiting.

Dan, to make sure that he really did have the three kings, took up his hole card, stared hard at it, put it down. Joe too got a glimpse of the card's face in Dan's awkward, drunken fingers. And Joe's heart sank. Three aces were in sight on the table. Two were the gambler's cards; the third ace was in Dan's hand. And the ace of clubs was the hole card that Joe himself had pushed away toward the center of the table. The card was still there, just where Joe had pushed it. So he knew that his friend the gambler could not possibly have three aces; he knew that Black Dan did have three kings.

Joe had never in his life consciously done a dishonest thing. But this wasn't like any other poker game. This was for Dad, for his wife and pretty daughters who awaited his return. Joe reached out his foot under the table and warningly kicked at the gambler's shin. The gambler drew his foot away, but no expression came upon his pale face. Inscrutably he eyed Black Dan, waiting. Dan, with his kings, saw the raise.

Then the fifth and last card fell; a four to Dan, a three to the gambler.

"Huh, them pair o' aces bets," said

Dan, squinting at the gambler.

The gambler slowly, confidently touched his pouch.

"All of it," he said coolly.

Black Dan cursed.

"I ain't got that much." He estimated the pouch by its full bellied look, eyed his own pouch and hesitated.

Joe felt as if he had been dipped in ice water, and held his breath to see whether or not Black Dan would call with all he had, or, bluffed out, discard his three kings. If he called, he had the winning hand; and he would at once discover that the gambler's pouch was padded.

Dan fidgeted. He was uneasy, yet three kings were a powerful hand.

"All right," he said. "I'll call with what I've got. An' I've got three kings." He turned the hole card over, face up. "An' I'll know there's been somethin' crooked if you've got—"

He didn't know, of course; but it was his way to accuse any one who beat him in a big pot.

"—if you've got three aces!" said Black Dan, glaring.

"I have!" said the gambler. "Three aces." The low husky voice was steady. Not a muscle trembled. He stood up, slowly. His eyes were fixed staringly on Dan's face. Without looking, his fingers touched his hole card, still face down.

Joe knew that he simply couldn't have that third ace. He glanced at the discards, marking again the very ace he himself had pushed aside.

Joe looked at the gambler. He was, with eyes still fixed on Black Dan, slowly turning over the hole card; then, with long forefinger across the top, thumb at the bottom, he thrust out his arm and held the card close to Black Dan's face as if to make sure that Dan would see it clearly.

"Now kill me, or get out of here!" said the gambler, and flipped the card to the table, face down. With that, he crossed his arms and gazed steadily at Black Dan.

Dan glared into the glitter of the gambler's unwinking eyes. He mumbled something, then whined and looked down at the table. The eyes of every man were fixed on Black Dan.

"Well, all I w-wanted w-was for to make sure," said Black Dan humbly. "Me, I allus know a square gambler when I see 'im. I—I don't mind bein' beat square."

He gazed almost imploringly into the fever bright eyes of the gambler, but the gambler did not move; the gleam in his eyes did not waver. Dan turned sullenly, mumbled something, and with a lurch of mingled drunkenness and anger he stumbled from the tent.

The gambler, still standing, drew a handkerchief and wiped his lips.

NAVY CROSS

By
COMMANDER
EDWARD
ELLSBERG

IN A drydock at the New York Navy Yard lay the shattered *S-51,* water still gushing from a huge gash in her port side. A tangle of water soaked hawsers, reeving lines and airhoses were draped, like a gigantic net, over her shell encrusted sides and decks.

Abaft the conning tower, a mud covered sailor in a gas mask waved his hand. A crane on the dock creaked; a wooden stage on which lay four rigid forms swathed in white sheets rose slowly from the submarine's deck, swung up, round, and then came gently down alongside some waiting ambulances. The dead on the *S-51,* brought in with their ship from the ocean depths off Block Island, were on their way to their last resting place.

Around the edge of the huge drydock moved a silent crowd, gazing in awe at the broken submarine; at the battered pontoons, now lying helter-skelter in the drydock, which had lifted her from her grave; at the still figures of her crew,

A noted authority on deep sea rescue work, Commander Ellsberg first gained recognition for his work as Salvage Officer on the U. S. S-51. For this operation the Navy awarded him the Distinguished Service medal, the first time that honor had been conferred in time of peace.

When the ill-fated S-4 sank, after a collision in the fog off Provincetown, in December, 1927, Commander Ellsberg volunteered for service in trying to rescue the forty men trapped in the frail shell on the ocean floor. The story of that vain and heart-breaking fight against time is known to all. Nobody has described those harrowing days more graphically than Commander Ellsberg, in his much read book, "On the Bottom." The present story, "Navy Cross," is a stirring sequel to the events in that book.

found even in death clinging to their controls.

Scattered here and there through the multitude were a few sailors, the crew of the *Falcon*, divers and deck force, looking for the hundredth time at the submarine they had salvaged, still hardly able to believe that they had her at last safely landed inside the drydock with the gate closed; still fearing that the sight before them was only a dream from which they would any moment wake to find themselves battling with the cold sea for the hulk of the *S-51*.

The day slipped by. The crowd gradually dwindled. One by one the sailors, convinced at last that their task was really done, drifted back about the *Falcon*, moored just outside the drydock, and resumed packing their sea bags, preparatory to returning to the ships and stations all over the world from which the Navy had hastily assembled them as volunteers for the job of salvaging its lost submarine.

IN THE little stateroom belonging to the *Falcon's* skipper I leaned over the chartboard, checking for the last time the recommendations for rewarding the bluejackets who had done the work, which Lieutenant Hartley, as captain of the diving ship, was preparing to forward to the Navy Department. There was little we could do for the men who had risked life and health at the bottom of the sea; already they had been paid—a dollar and twenty cents an hour for the time they had put in while diving. A pitifully small sum. Money certainly had never been a factor in the job; it could be none in the reward. A few bits of ribbon, a few letters of commendation, a few promotions in rank held as petty officers—these recognitions we could recommend, but not too profusely for fear that a department not yet too well acquainted with the dangers of that job might turn the whole list down.

So there lay the list for the Navy Cross: Tom Eadie, Joe Eiben, Jim Frazer, John Kelley, Francis Smith and Tug Wilson, all chief petty officers. For a letter of commendation, Chief Torpedoman Fred Michels. For a letter of commendation and, in addition, promotion to a chief's billet, Gunner's Mate Bailey, Boatswain's Mate Carr, Gunner's Mate Wickwire.

A rap at the stateroom door. I quit checking, hastily shoved the papers together, called out—

"Come!"

The door swung open. I looked up inquiringly. There stood Boatswain's Mate, First Class, Bill Carr, his face a little more pugnacious than usual, a belligerent note in his voice as he growled out—

" 'Evenin', Mr. Ellsberg."

"Hello, Carr. What's on your mind?"

"Say, Mr. Ellsberg, the ship's writer's passed round the word that ye're sendin' in the recommendations now on the boys that's been workin' on this job. That right?"

"Yes, that's right. The skipper's told the yeoman it's O.K. to let each man know what we're recommending him for. And we'll do our damnedest, all hands from Captain King at the sub base and Admiral Plunkett at the yard here down, to get them approved in Washington. But it won't be easy, Carr, because we're asking for lots."

"Well, mebbe, but I dunno." Carr twisted his watch cap uneasily. "Say, look here. The yeoman tells me I'm in for a letter o' commendation an' promotion from first class to chief, but some o' the other boys tells me they're gonna git a Navy Cross. What sorta deal d'ye call that, anyway?"

I looked at him in surprise. The same old Carr, all right, whom I had worked with for nine months over the wreck—always doing a good job, always grumbling over what a dog's life the divers led. What next?

"Looks pretty good to me, Carr," I responded. "Here you get a chief's rate with more pay than you're getting now, and a fine letter from the Secretary of the Navy commending your bravery and zeal."

"That chief's billet is O. K. with me. But the letter, what's it good for, I ask you? Kin I go round readin' it to my shipmates 'r pin it on my coat at quarters? Like hell! Why don't I rate a Navy Cross like Tug 'r Joe 'r Tom? Sumpin' I kin wear for the other gobs to see 'n' know I'm a hero—not just a letter that's read onct 'n' stowed away."

Carr paused and leaned over my shoulder; his tone became almost pleading.

"Say, look here, Commander, I made more dives on that job 'n anybody else. Ain't that so, Skipper?" And he looked over at Lieutenant Hartley.

The captain of the *Falcon* nodded.

"Yes, Commander, Carr's right on that. He was on the bottom more times than any other diver."

Carr turned to me triumphantly.

"There ye are, Commander. What's any o' these other birds done to rate a

Navy Cross more'n me?"

Patiently I tried to explain. Yes, it was true he had made more dives than any one else, and done highly effective work on every dive. And that was why he was being promoted and commended. But the Navy Cross—that stood for something more than dogged work and the bulldog courage that every diver must have if he is to work at all. The men who were getting the Navy Cross, I thought, Hartley thought, Captain King thought, had all been thrust into specially hazardous situations inside or out the submarine, where they had advanced the job by extraordinary heroism, over and above the usual dangers of a diver's life.

"It's tough, I'll admit, Carr," I continued, "that nothing like that happened in your work; I know you're as good as any of 'em. But we can't recommend a man for a medal just for being a good diver. He'd never get it, and it would only hurt the chances of the boys who've earned one. Take what you're getting and be happy; some of the other divers are only getting a kind word for their share in salvaging this sub."

I paused to let this soak in, then stressed the point:

"No promotion, no letter, no nothing. And I haven't heard a peep out of one of 'em. What have you got to kick about, anyway?"

"About that Navy Cross I rate like the rest o' the boys," growled Carr. "A letter o' commendation! Who in hell knows ye got one a week after it's read? Say, I'm gonna see Cap'n King about it!"

He shoved off abruptly to search for the squadron commander.

But Captain King, like the rest of us, must have been adamant, for when the approved recommendations came back from Washington, Bill Carr became a chief boatswain's mate, but he was not included in the little group of divers on whose breasts now glistened the coveted Navy Cross.

THE salvage squadron dispersed, the officers and crew of the *Falcon* scattered—some to other ships; some, mainly divers sick of the sea, back to civil life. The hardships, the dangers, the gnawing fears of battling death in the cold ocean depths gradually faded from our minds; the *S-51*, even to the men who salvaged her, rapidly became only a memory. Two years went by. I was out of the Navy, after sixteen years' service a landlubber again, living quietly near New York, the sea and its perils vanished from my daily life.

And then one Sunday morning in December I opened my door to see flaring up at me from the paper lying there a huge headline:

"Submarine *S-4* Lost With All Hands!"

As quickly as possible I had the Navy Department in Washington on the long distance wire to volunteer my services; in a few hours I was in the Brooklyn Navy Yard being sworn back into the Navy. Inside a careening ambulance, with siren shrieking its way through traffic, I was rushed to Grand Central Terminal just in time to catch an express for Boston; a destroyer waiting in the Navy Yard there shoved off as I crossed the gangplank, to pound her way through darkness and the Wintry seas across Massachusetts Bay for Provincetown.

A gale was blowing off Cape Cod when we arrived just after midnight. Inside Provincetown harbor, shielded from the storm, crept the destroyer to find there all the vessels of the hurriedly improvised salvage squadron—the submarine mothership *Bushnell;* a few tugs; several Coast Guard cutters; and the destroyer *Paulding* which had sunk the *S-4*. Only the *Falcon* lay outside, braving the gale over the grave of the submarine.

No large vessel could approach the *Falcon;* no small boat could safely breast the seas. But I had come to join the *Falcon;* the S.O.P. of the Coast Guard

fleet offered to get me out where the *Falcon* lay. But he doubted that a small boat could get alongside in that sea without being stove in; it was improbable that I could actually get aboard. Still I could try. A Coast Guard motor lifeboat was called over. I scrambled in. It started out, and soon we cleared the harbor and stood out where the storm had a free sweep at us.

I have been in small boats before, some on the Southern Drill Grounds repairing targets in bad weather, but never in a cockleshell had I struck weather like that. The little boat battled its way through the darkness; the cold December wind froze the spray as it drove over our gunwales; the boat heaved and pitched sickeningly as it met the unseen waves. I crouched in the sternsheets with the coxswain, stared ahead at the bowman, peered occasionally at the engineer, huddled in the flimsy cubbyhole covering his engine, almost smothered in the fumes there.

We pounded along toward the dim lights miles ahead. Ice formed on my coat; my hands and feet grew numb; the seas rose higher. As I watched the silent figures in frozen oilskins, my respect for the men in the Coast Guard rose; in frail boats like this they faced the sea in time of storm to succor shipwrecked crews, nor always came back safely. Real sailors.

The engine throbbed steadily, the lights ahead grew brighter, and we made out the vague hull of the *Falcon,* pitching violently to head seas, straining madly at her solitary anchor. In a wide circle we swept round her. 3:00 A. M. So far as I could see there was no life aboard, no watch on deck, only a few lights. Queer. What was wrong on the *Falcon?*

A yell in my ear. The coxswain was shouting to make himself heard above the storm.

"No use! There's no lee on either side. She's heading square into the wind. I can't get alongside!"

He was right. The crest and troughs sweeping past the *Falcon* were equally bad port or starboard; a small boat coming alongside would be crushed like an eggshell if she touched the careening *Falcon.*

We made another circle, rolling terribly when the waves caught us broadside as we turned. Still no lee.

Another shout in my ear.

"We better go back! Can't make it!"

I shook my head, yelled back:

"Never mind a landing! Take it on the fly. Go by a few feet clear. I'll jump!"

"It'll smash the boat. Better not!"

I insisted. The coxswain gave in, made another circle, in the darkness tried to steam down the port side, keeping only a few feet clear, but was swept off by the seas. Another swing round the bow, another wild ride with the wind down the starboard side, and then we headed up under the stern again, sheered in for the port quarter. I crouched over the gunwale of the boat, my hands frozen, my legs stiff. We came closer, rolling and pitching sickeningly, one second deep in the trough of the sea, the next on a crest looking down over the heaving bulwark of the *Falcon.* We sank once more, then, nearly midships of the *Falcon,* started to rise to the next wave. Abaft me I saw the coxswain sheer in, heard him roar—

"Jump!"

Hopeless to use my numbed hands. As the boat lifted high above the bulwark, hung poised an instant before sheering off, I dived across the few intervening feet of water, slid head first over the icy rail of the *Falcon,* sprawled out flat on the deck. A quartermaster, appearing it seemed from nowhere, helped me up. I stared out over the rail. Vaguely I made out the lifeboat fading rapidly into the night off the port bow, then turned to the quartermaster.

"Where's everybody?"

"Turned in, Commander. Terrible day. All hands knocked out now. An' we can't dive no more—the divers are

all shot too. You'll find 'em in the recompression tank, all three of 'em."

"Only three divers?"

"Yeh, an' they're in a bad way," the quartermaster shouted into the wind. "One of 'em's dying, I think."

Dying?

Without wasting any more time and without bothering to wake any one to report my arrival, I hurried across the ship to the recompression tank, hastily manipulated the air valves, locked myself through the outer chamber, came out under pressure to the inner chamber of the "iron doctor."

There on the floor lay Fred Michels, rigid, blue, unconscious. Over him leaned Carr and Eadie. They looked up, nodded silently, resumed their work over their prostrate shipmate.

I knelt down, turned to with them to help.

In snatches I got the situation as we worked over Michels. Eadie, first down, had briefly surveyed the submarine, found six men alive forward. Carr, down next, had secured an airhose to the salvage air connection in the side of the *S-4's* conning tower. Then diving had ceased as the *Falcon* hauled clear, blew air into the ballast tanks in an attempt to expel the water, float the boat up. The attempt had failed. And meanwhile, night and a rising storm had come; the other vessels gathered over the wreck started to seek shelter. Diving was no longer possible.

But, without air, the men left in the torpedo room would die before the storm blew over. Something must be done. Michels volunteered to go overboard. At eleven o'clock on the wildest night that diving has ever been tried, he went over the side with another airhose, was fouled on the *S-4's* deck; Eadie, after a desperate struggle on the bottom, had freed him, brought him up unconscious.

And there he lay, while the *Falcon,* without any more divers, and unable to use them had they been available, tossed endlessly in the storm over the *S-4.*

THE next night. Michels, fighting his way back to life, was in a hospital ashore. The storm still blew; the *Falcon,* alone off Cape Cod, pitched dismally to the seas. We had more divers now, but to what end? No one could dive.

Communication had been established with the men in the *S-4's* torpedo room. In dots and dashes, rapped out with a hammer, the trapped men told their story. Water leaking into their compartment, oxygen gone, air getting bad. Could we send down some soda lime? We could—if the storm blew over. The hours dragged along, the December gale kept pounding the surface. The messages grew fainter, less frequent. Two days down now. Another message—

"Is there any hope?"

How answer dying men on that? Hopelessly we looked at the seas.

And the third day. And then the wind died down, the seas calmed somewhat. Diving was possible. But there was no longer need for haste; the tapping inside the *S-4* had ceased. Nevertheless, feverish divers worked to get new buoy lines on the wreck, and by nightfall had airhoses coupled directly into the torpedo room, fresh air going in, bad air venting out. Too late . . .

RESCUE work was over; the *S-4* was now a salvage job. How bring her to the surface? In Provincetown harbor floated half a dozen huge pontoons, hurriedly towed there from New York. To use them we must dig tunnels under the hulk of the *S-4,* pass anchor chains underneath for a lifting cradle. But the *S-4* had been rammed at high speed by the *Paulding,* rammed so hard that the *Paulding,* with a smashed bow, had nearly sunk herself. What had the collision done to the *S-4?* None of our divers yet had seen the actual damage, nor were they naval architects, familiar with structural design. Was the *S-4* so badly cut open in the smash that she might break when we started to lift?

To answer that question I prepared to dive myself.

On the little dressing bench on the *Falcon's* fantail I sat, bundled in three layers of heavy woolen underwear, shivering in the cold December wind, while around me the "bears" struggled to draw on over my padded form a stiff rubber suit. My feet, shoes and all, slid into the legs of the diving dress, my hands down into the watertight mittens cemented to the sleeves. On went breastplate, lead-soled shoes, lead belt. I fumbled among the lead weights for the diving knife, breathed a little more easily when I felt it secured to my belt. A webbed headdress slipped on my head, a pair of telephone receivers were clamped over my ears, the helmet was lifted near my face and the head-set jack plugged into the transmitter. I leaned over the helmet.

A few brief words passed between me and the invisible telephone tender on the other end of my line, hidden somewhere among the boats on the *Falcon's* superstructure. Telephone O. K. I nodded to the bears.

Down over my head came the helmet; some one seized my shoulders, braced them; a heavy twist on the helmet and the joint was locked, the safety latch dropped home.

Outside sounds faded away; air began to whistle through my suit. A slap on the back. I rose. Staggering under the two hundred pound load of lead and copper in my rig, I was helped aboard the stage, grabbed the bails, was hoisted up, out over the rail, and down into the icy sea.

The water rose over me. My suit shrank in round my legs, squeezed all the air out till only round my chest was my suit slack. Down another yard. The waves washed over my faceplate, and I could hear air gurgling out my exhaust. The stage paused.

Swiftly I adjusted my air valves, tested my telephone set again, then stepped off the stage and, dangling in the water by my lifelines, was dragged forward alongside the *Falcon's* hull to the descending line. Reaching out through the water, I seized the line, wrapped my legs round it, waved my hand, took a last look at the surface, billowing over me like a silver sheet. My lifelines slacked. I started down to the *S-4*.

Swiftly I sank through the water, swallowing rapidly while I pressed my nose against the faceplate to relieve the pressure on my eardrums. The light grew dimmer; even through heavy clothing I began to feel the chill of the sea. Everything faded from view except the manila line down which I slid, and even this seemed to dissolve into the water a few yards above.

Below me the line started to slope away, became more difficult to cling to. I gripped it more tightly between my legs, slowed my descent, peered downward through the faceplate. A little to one side, where the bight of the descending line ended, was the sharp bow of the *S-4*. I dropped a few feet more, got my lead shoes on it, with difficulty managed to straighten up, and let go the descending line. I was on the submarine!

For a moment I paused, breathing heavily, trying to become accustomed to the pressure. Nearly two years had gone by since last I had been on the bottom; my head felt dizzy and my heart pounded under the sudden impact of the highly compressed air roaring through my helmet. I fumbled with my valves, adjusted inlet and exhaust to balance off my rig, then jerked my lifelines three times—

"More slack."

Swaying unsteadily in the cold depths, I clung to the lifelines till I felt the answering signal and my lines slacked a little. Reassured even by this slight contact with my tenders above, I pulled myself together and slowly started aft, head down, tugging slightly against the drag of my lines, moving with the peculiar slow-motion gait of the diver breasting the water.

Beneath my lead-soled shoes the deck of the *S-4* started to widen out. My footing became more secure; I went a little faster. Breathing under a pressure of four atmospheres, my mind felt thick, thoughts came slowly, but, even so, the undamaged condition of the sub under my feet began to make me wonder. I was passing over the torpedo room, all silent now; no raps came from the inside in answer to the metallic clatter of my shoes on the deck. Nothing wrong with the boat yet. In as fine shape as the day she was built.

And then I came to the jumping off place, stopped suddenly. In front of me the deck and the superstructure were gone, wiped completely away; only a watery chasm yawned in my path abaft the ragged edge of the torn plating where the *Paulding* had plowed her way over the *S-4's* hull.

Very gingerly I slid over the edge into the hole till I stood on the outer shell of the spindle hull, again started aft, head down, searching now through my faceplates for the hole *through* the hull itself, cautiously moving one heavy foot after the other, for now I could see I was walking along the smooth top of a steel cylinder with nothing to hold to, and a misstep sidewise certain to start me sliding overboard.

As I moved along my sodden wits became more befuddled with each step. Where was that hole I was seeking? No damage even to the outer hull, let alone the inner one. True, the superstructure seemed wiped off clean, as one might wipe the frosting off a cake, but the hull itself was perfect—so far as I could see. Where had the sea roared through to flood the boat, drown the crew?

I paused. Another sharp precipice in my path; before me the undamaged superstructure rose sharply again from the hull, while just beyond I could see the *S-4's* gun swung crazily athwartship, breech high above the deck, muzzle jammed down on the port rail. Carefully I clambered back on deck, fearful of cutting open my suit on the torn edge of the broken deck, then looked round to see that my lifelines still led safely upward, unfouled in any wreckage.

Scrambling over the depressed muzzle on the port side, a few more steps brought me to the conning tower. No apparent damage there. I sidled down the narrow passage outboard the conning tower, tugging heavily against the drag of my lifelines, curious to examine the remainder of the silent vessel beneath my feet, when a dim recollection of my mission brought me to. Every minute of my hour on the bottom was precious; my job was only to find the damage, and certainly it was forward, not aft. I could afford to waste no time inspecting the stern.

Turning, I retraced my steps, saw my lines clear of fouling the deep periscope still projecting part way above the conning tower, signaled to the surface to take in the slack as I returned.

Over the gun once more, then another cautious climb down into the gap where the deck was gone, and again I started along the top of the rounded steel hull to search a second time for the hole which somehow I must have missed on my first passage.

A FEW uncertain steps forward and I paused dumbfounded. I could no longer see the submarine under my feet. I could no longer see even my feet! From my waist down, everything had vanished from view. I had the weird sensation of standing half buried in a fog. In my first trip I had seen plainly enough, for a short distance at any rate, but there must have been a thin film of mud covering the sunken submarine which my movements had stirred up behind me. Now on the way back, there the mud hung like a cloud over the *S-4*, blotting it from view.

Which way was forward? I looked round, saw nothing at all of the conning tower, of the gun. Too far aft, they

seemed to have dissolved in the translucent water.

A vague fear gripped me, increasing as I failed to sight anything but the billowing clouds of silt above which I towered, and the gravity of my position began to dawn on me. I was standing on the top of a smooth steel cylinder; one step in any direction but the right one and I would go sliding overboard. I dared not move till I knew which way was forward.

A little sick, my eyes stared through the glass port in my helmet at the bight of lifeline swaying unevenly in the water above my head and fading from view on the gray water. That line led from me to the *Falcon*, but how was the *Falcon* lying with respect to the *S-4* so that I might judge its direction? Ahead? Astern? Perhaps to starboard? I tried to puzzle it out.

And then came catastrophe. As I stood, eyes fixed on the lifeline, the *Falcon* on the surface must have taken an unusually heavy roll. The lifeline jerked heavily, heaved me off my balance. I felt myself sliding, sliding—down the cylindrical side, gathering speed as the slope increased, arms clutching futilely at the smooth steel plates. My heavily weighted form reached the side, started a free fall overboard. Then something projecting from the hull flashed into view as my helmet went by. Convulsively my right arm shot out, grabbed it. I stopped with a jolt, looked anxiously up through the faceplate to see what had stopped my descent, gave a startled gasp.

I was clinging to the broken stem of the destroyer *Paulding*, staring squarely into the hole it had punched through the *S-4's* side! There, not six inches from my helmet, was the reason the *S-4* had sunk, the damage for which I had been searching!

For a moment I forgot my predicament, surveyed the hole in astonishment. Could such a small hole, hardly eighteen inches across and mostly plugged at that by part of the *Paulding's* forefoot which, having punched through the submarine's double hull, had been torn from the destroyer as it hurtled by—could such a small hole have flooded the *S-4* so rapidly as to drown most of the crew before they got the watertight doors closed? Unbelievable! And yet it must have happened. I examined the hole again, concluded that while water under pressure might have quickly flooded the boat through that hole, the rupture was certainly not large enough to damage her structural strength. The *S-4* would never break under any lifting strains.

And that brought me back with a start to my own position. I forgot the *S-4*, started to think of myself, dangling by one arm over the side. How to get back on deck? Throwing my head back as far as possible, I looked out the top port at the jagged stem clutched in my gloved hand, got another shock. My watertight glove was cut open. A stream of air was funneling upward in large clusters of bubbles from the highest part of my suit!

In desperation I tried to draw myself upward, to stop the leak. No use, I was losing air too fast to develop any buoyancy in my suit; the dead weight of my clumsy belt and heavy shoes was too much for one arm to lift. I pressed my legs against the side of the sub, struggled frantically for a toehold to assist my climb. But only for an instant. Through the folds of my diving dress I felt my legs rubbing against jagged steel. The sides of the ship were torn there too; another move and the razor edges of the broken steel against which I lay might cut my rig wide open.

I quit struggling, hung motionless, looking up hopelessly at the air escaping from my rig, felt the sea starting to press in on my ribs, giving me a "squeeze" as I lost the air around my chest. A little more and breathing might be impossible. Another despairing glance upward. Useless to hang on. Better to let go and take my chances in a fall. I released my grip, dropped

heavily through the water.

I hit the bottom sidewise. The light went suddenly out, and I found myself completely buried in soft mud when I came to rest. In utter blackness I floundered an instant trying to straighten up. No result, nothing solid to press against, the mud gave with every move. My right side was down, my right arm under me. A little luck that, anyway. That torn glove was now the lowest part of my rig, not the highest; it could no longer bleed me of the precious air in my suit.

Panting violently, I paused a moment to think. What could I do? Ah, yes! The telephone in my helmet. A heave on my lifeline and my tenders on the surface would hoist me clear. I twisted my head a little, shouted into my transmitter:

"On deck! Take a pull on my line!"

With relief I heard the answering call of my telephone tender, waited tensely for the strain to come on my breastplate when they hauled. The seconds went by. I felt nothing. Anxiously I called again:

"Topside! Heave on my line!"

"We're heavin' hard an' gotta big strain! Don't you feel it?"

The words fell like a bludgeon on my ears. A heavy strain on my lifelines and no pull at all on me. That meant just one thing. My lines were foul! I had a fleeting vision of my airhose caught in that jagged mass of iron I had been clinging to, with the tenders on the surface heaving hard on that hose, sawing it across the sharp edges of the steel that had already ripped open my glove. Buried in the mud, weighed down with lead and copper, that hose was my only link to life. If it were cut— In agony I screamed:

"On deck, stop heaving, stop heaving! Slack my lines!"

To me in the darkness it seemed an age till the receivers strapped over my ears throbbed with the answer:

"Hello, Mr. Ellsberg. Your lines are slack now. What's wrong?"

My lines were slack. I gasped with relief at that, then explained briefly:

"Fell off the boat. Buried in the mud. Let my lines alone; they're fouled."

And then a final question—

"Want any help, Commander?"

"Help? Of course!"

NO MORE from the surface. I lay back panting from the effort of talking under heavy pressure, always a strenuous exertion for a diver. Help? But could they help me? By the time another diver could be dressed and sent down, my fouled lines might be severed. I dared not wait. I must clear myself.

Struggling violently, I tried again to straighten up, only to feel the lead weights on my body sinking me deeper in the mud. Panic stricken, I thrashed about harder. Was there no bottom to this ooze? And then I felt the sinking stop. Something solid under me at last. Again I twisted my shoulders, painfully braced myself to lift my helmet, then with a shudder quit struggling as I realized what I was lying on. Jagged corners, broken iron, shattered pieces of keel plate torn from the *Paulding,* sunk in the mud alongside the watterlogged submarine, with me sprawled out sidewise, my flimsy rubber suit pressing down on those razor edges! The last straw.

Quietly I lay there, afraid to move a muscle, numb with fear, listening to the air whistling through my helmet, wondering how soon part of that sharp steel pressing into my back would punch through my suit, flood my helmet.

The minutes dragged by. Ghastly visions flashed across my mind. Close alongside me, cold, quiet, lay the broken *S-4,* forty corpses in her hulk. And just outside that sunken coffin I saw myself, the forty-first, buried already, likely any moment to join that silent company should my airhose part, my suit tear.

In the blackness of eternal night, the strange stillness of the ocean floor, my frenzied mind groped for a way out.

The telephone? Why strain my lungs again on that? Useless to telephone again; those on the topside might only make matters worse. Claw my way up? No. Move I dared not. What else? Resolutely I tried to pull my wits together, concentrate my muddled thoughts. I must get myself clear, I must get myself clear. I repeated it over and over. How?

In a daze, for thinking under that ocean pressure was difficult, I turned over in my mind what diving tricks I knew. Release my lead belt? Cut loose my heavy diving shoes? Lighten up? Impossible for me; too much movement required. Slowly, one by one, I went over the possibilities, and in despair discarded them. I was trapped.

Then, as I lay, that whistling roar in my helmet brought a vague remembrance of something else. The air! Like a flash of lightning in the darkness the answer came. The air! Dazzling hope! A sure way opened for escape if I could hold enough air in my suit.

Shoving my ripped glove as far down as possible, I carefully dragged my left arm through the mud, clawed in the blackness with my watertight glove for the air control valve over my left breast, gasped with relief as my fingers finally closed over the valve wheel. I could do it, inflate my suit, float myself up through the ooze!

Cautiously I twisted the control valve open wide. Air rushed through my helmet faster than it could escape through exhaust valve or torn glove; my suit started to expand, to become more buoyant. Gently my shoulders rose under the tug. I felt myself lifting to a vertical position. I lost touch with that bed of jagged iron. Another twist on the valve; the air fairly roared past my ears, swelled my rig. A strong lift now to my suit. I felt my breastplate tugging hard against the straps, urging me up.

And then my helmet burst through the mud, the dull gray light of the ocean floor flooded in, startling in its brilliance after the utter blackness of that ooze. Light! My throbbing eyes drank it greedily. Light! Anything was possible now.

Erect at last, I felt my body rising clear. I hastily shut off my air completely. A new peril waited if I tore loose from that mud. I was buoyant now, excessively so. If the mud lost its grip on me in that state, I could not stay down. Once free in the water, the buoyant rig which had dragged me from the mud, no longer a blessing but a curse, would start me for the surface, my suit bellying out as the sea pressure decreased and the air inside expanded; with constantly increasing buoyancy, spread-eagled in my rig, I would go shooting for the surface, unable to stop myself. With no decompression, a case of "bends" was sure to result.

Hurriedly I lifted the ripped glove over my head to help bleed air from my suit, held it there till I felt the grip of the sea rising on my chest as the air went out, felt myself sinking back slightly into the bottom. And not till then did I lower my arm, open my air valve a little, carefully keeping myself heavy.

I looked down. Still buried nearly to my waist. But that could wait. Now that I could see, could I clear myself? My precious airhose, what was it hung up on? Anxiously I looked up. To my amazement. I saw lifeline and airhose leading straight up through the water, no undue slack, no loose coils indicating a fouled line. Had my lines come clear while I was struggling? Perhaps.

"On the topside!" I called into my transmitter. "Take an *easy* pull on my lines!"

An anxious moment, then I felt a gentle tug come on my breastplate. The lines were clear. Now to get back on the submarine.

"On deck! I'm all clear now. Take me up ten feet!"

The strain on my lines increased, I watched my legs drag free of the mud, found myself suspended in the water,

going up in jerks as, hand over hand, the tenders on the *Falcon* heaved in my lifelines.

A faraway call in my ears:

"Ten feet, Commander. How's that?"

"O. K. Hold it!"

Dangling on my lines, I peered out through the faceplate. No submarine in my line of vision. Kicking out vigorously and half swimming with my arms, I twisted round a complete circle, straining my eyes for the vague outline of the *S-4*. It was nowhere in sight, yet I could hardly be more than a few feet off. Useless to try to find it again; besides, my job was done. In a brief call to the surface I learned I had been down nearly an hour; my time was up anyway for a normal dive. I ordered the tenders to start me for the surface.

AND then came my decompression. In lengthening stages I paused on my way up, hanging in the icy water to let the air dissolved under pressure in my blood work out gradually. Another hour went by before I was at last hoisted through the surface and, thoroughly chilled by my long immersion, dropped on the *Falcon's* quarterdeck. A bench was jammed under me, my helmet was twisted off, the bears cut loose my lead belt and shoes. Supported by a tender on each side, I was rushed forward to the recompression tank, shoved through the lock, the steel door slammed, and air started to whistle in, building up pressure again on me to make sure no bubbles formed in my blood, guarding against the "bends".

I slumped down on the floor of the tank, looked round the steel chamber while the tenders who had come in with me unbolted my breastplate, stripped off my dripping suit. I had company. Bill Carr, in diving underwear, was sprawled out on the floor. Tom Eadie was rubbing him, working hard to restore proper circulation.

I looked at them curiously. Strange. I didn't know any other diver had been down, yet there was Carr, nearly as wet as I. He couldn't have beat me to the surface by much.

Eadie looked up as I curled myself round the little electric stove, trying to warm up.

"How you feelin', Mr. Ellsberg?" he asked, eyeing me anxiously.

"O. K, now, I guess, Eadie, except I'm damn near frozen stiff. I fell off the sub and cut my suit, and I'm all soaked."

I stretched out; the bears pulled off my wet underwear, started to rub my legs.

Eadie turned Carr over, commenced massaging his spine. For a moment he rubbed vigorously, then spoke again.

"Say, Commander, did you know Carr went down after you did?"

"No, I didn't know anybody else was on the bottom during my dive." I looked at Carr, face down on the deck. "What did they send you down for, Carr?"

Carr turned his neck a little to get his chin clear of the deck, mumbled:

"To dig a tunnel. I took a fire hose down to start washin' under the port bow for the lifting chains an' it was—"

Eadie broke in, cut him short:

"Well, when you telephoned you was in trouble, it looked mighty lucky we had another man already on the bottom to lend a hand. So I grabbed Carr's phone and sung out to him:

" 'Hey, Carr! Commander Ellsberg's buried in the mud on the other side o' the boat. Hurry an' give 'im a hand!' An' d'ye know what Carr said when I told him that?"

I looked from Eadie to the prostrate Carr, then back again.

"No, Tom, I can't imagine. What did he say?"

"Well, I could hear Bill swearin' at first, sorta to himself while he must 'ave been tryin' to get a good grip on the fire hose so's he could talk, then Carr jammed his face against the transmitter in his helmet an' roared back:

" 'Aw, tell 'im to go to hell! I'm

stuck myself!' "

Carr twisted out from under Eadie's hands, sat bolt upright, his red face redder than ever, and blurted out angrily:

"What sort of a yarn ye givin' us anyway, Tom?" He turned abruptly to me. "Say, Mr. Ellsberg, you don't believe that, do you? You know I'd never do anything like that if you was in trouble, would I?"

I glanced at Eadie, caught a faint grin in his usually serious face; reassured, I looked again into Carr's belligerent eyes.

"Of course not, Carr. Tom's kidding you. What did you say?"

"Well, when I gets the word in my receivers that Commander Ellsberg's fallen off the pig an' is buried in the mud, I gives one whoop, drops my hose, an' in two jumps I'm up on deck of the sub, runnin' aft to rescue you; an' what I really sung out was:

" 'Hooray! Here's where I get that medal!' "

Carr paused and looked at me mournfully.

"Another chance to be a hero shot! For the love o' Mike, Commander, why didn't you wait for me?"

* * *

Nevertheless, before the *S-4* job was over, Bill Carr realized his ambition at last and the coveted Navy Cross was finally pinned on his breast—but not for rescuing me.

The SAGA *of the* SIXSHOOTER

1—*Pistols*

By CARL ELMO FREEMAN

A GERMAN, Berthold Swartz, is credited with inventing the first practical gun. But there seems to have been guns, more or less practical, long before his time. When we consider the tubes in the bows of the galleys of the Eastern Empire through which Greek fire was discharged upon the decks of the enemy's vessels at the moment of ramming, it is not surprising that the first guns were cannon and breech-loading. These tubes or guns were fired by means of a "match", as were all cannon up to about the middle of the 19th Century—1850, to be exact.

The invention of the first pistol, or gun that could be pointed and fired with one hand, is credited to an Italian, Caminelleo Vetelli, of Pistoja, Italy, in the year 1540. And here again there seems to be no doubt that one-hand guns were used before that.

The name pistol is said to come from the reputed birthplace of the arm; or from the fact that the caliber of the first weapons made was the same as the coin of that period called the pistole; or because it was carried on the pistollo —pommel—of the saddle. The last explanation has the widest appeal, as the pistol has always been the arm of the horseman.

The first pistols were matchlock, smooth bore, single shot, muzzle loading weapons. They were first used for military purposes by the German cavalry in the battle of Renty in 1544. They were adopted by the French in 1550 and by the English a few years later.

Wheel-locks were the first pistols to come into anything like general use. In them, pulling a trigger set going a toothed steel wheel against a piece of iron pyrites held by a clamp over the powder

in the priming pan. They were enormous, clumsy affairs, made to be carried in saddle holsters and so costly as to be quite beyond the reach of any but the richest people.

The first guns in which a piece of flint was used to strike sparks into the flash pan were called *snaphaans, snaphaunce,* or *snaphance.* They are said to have been invented by the Dutch poultry thieves—*snaphaans,* hen thieves. These chicken thieves could not afford the wheel-locks and the lighted matches of matchlocks would lead to detection, so they devised a way of touching off their guns with sparks struck from flints.

The real flintlocks, as we know them, made their appearance about 1630 and remained in service for over two hundred years. In fact they are still in use in remote sections of Africa.

Rifling gun-barrels was patented in England about 1635. But no effort was made to apply this innovation to pistols till much later. In some of the old pocket pistols there are occasionally found grooves near the muzzle, called muzzle rifling. And their purpose is explained as follows: As pocket pistols were carried in the side pockets they were subjected to considerable bumping. It was found that when the ball had been forced down from the muzzle upon the powder charge, and the pistol left loaded for long periods, the ball would frequently work loose and the powder spill out in the pocket.

To overcome this condition, the barrel was made to unscrew from the breach and a slightly oversize ball was forced in the rear and the powder charge poured in behind it. These grooves were not cut to improve the ballistics of the weapon, or to give the bullet a spin; but were cut merely as sockets to engage the teeth of a spanner which was used to unscrew the barrel.

Up to about the time the first shot of the Revolutionary War was fired from a pistol on Lexington green, they were not accurate affairs even at short range. They were pointed and fired. Many had the hammer up on top in such a position that taking aim was an impossibility. Others may have been aimed "by line of metal," sighting along the barrel.

The sword, however, was resorted to in affairs of honor.

Beginning a Two Part Story

WHITE

CHAPTER I

"Where are your tigers?"

"ARE you Mr. Bread by any chance?"

Joe Bread drew his knife and, as it might be cautiously, cut off a corner of Kiss Me plug tobacco. He inserted it into his cheek.

"Weren't no chance about it," he remarked. "Pa married ma. I seen the c'tificate."

He was a rangy man with red hair on his forearms and red eyebrows that projected like a hairy vizor above eyes of flint. There was fire at the back of the flint, but on the surface smoky, almost languid, calm. He had a nose that might have looked aristocratic on a more regular face; it was rather thin along the ridge and slightly aquiline. A bristly red beard, looking as if he had recently trimmed it with a pruning knife, suggested that he shaved clean when convenient. His mouth, beneath the furious mustache, was patient—maybe incredulous. He stood at least six feet tall and his neck looked unbreakable. Red hair on his chest showed through a flannel shirt devoid of buttons. He wore a khaki helmet at an insolently reckless angle.

"You the mish'n'ry?"

"I am Mr. Barking."

Joe Bread's eyes closed fractionally.

"Glad to meet you, Reverend. Where are y'r tigers?"

The Reverend Walter Barking looked up, since he had to, and smiled amiably; but the smile was only on the surface. He was neat, alert, athletic looking in a small way, clean shaven—pale from the Indian heat and overwork. Not at all Joe Bread's kind. Both men knew that instantly.

"I will tell you this evening about the tigers," he answered. "What a privilege yours is, to be connected with the Artemisia Picture people."

Joe Bread's eyes again contracted slightly.

"Pay's good," he answered.

"The laborer is worthy of his hire," said Barking. "What I meant is that, in my opinion, your firm produces pictures that are truly a labor of love in God's vineyard."

"Yeah," said Bread, "they're pious.

TIGERS

But I got a contrac'—an' teeth to it. Piety ain't my long suit. I'm the trouble fixer."

Barking frowned.

"They were to send an expert with some capable assistants to track down and kill two white tigers," he said with an air of having been imposed upon.

"That's me," Bread answered. "Crew's along, too. Where are them tigers at?"

Barking ceased frowning and smiled, but the lips drew just a shade too tightly on his white teeth.

"In my cablegram," he said, "I offered maintenance for you and your men in addition to any help I can give you. You may take any pictures you like. The tigerskins will belong to the mission."

"Findin's keepin's," Bread retorted. "Tigers are white, eh? What in hell for do you want to shoot 'em?"

Barking's smile vanished.

"They have killed eleven people as well as goats and cattle almost beyond count. They must be shot before they do more damage."

"Tried it any?"

"My dear sir, I would hardly cable Hollywood to get you sent here from

Ceylon, and go to all the trouble to obtain permits for you, without first exhausting every other expedient. I have had hunters here by the dozen—Indian *shikarris,* and no less than three Europeans. I regret to say one European was killed. I have myself set a trap, and have sat up in a tree all night long waiting for those tigers."

"Oh, yeah?"

Barking stiffened slightly.

"They are abnormally cunning. By the merest accident I heard that the Artemisia Corporation had an animal expert in Ceylon. My wife's first cousin is on their board of directors, so I cabled all the details—"

"Yeah, I seen a copy of it. I was gettin' some shots of an elephant roundup or I'd ha' been here sooner."

"Sooner?" said the missionary. "I expected you about the middle of next week. How did you make the train connections?"

"Hell, I didn't come by train. I fixed it with the Royal Air Force. Had to swap planes eight times."

"But they're not allowed to carry passengers."

"Oh, yeah? Seems I got here."

"Where is the plane that brought you?"

Joe Bread's mouth accented patience.

"Had to make a landin' twenty mile off. Came in last night on an elephant. He's haulin' baulks."

THE missionary's jaw dropped. His eyes became signals of exclamation. He stared past Joe Bread at a group of *neem* trees, skirted with undergrowth, at the edge of an enormous forest. They screened from view a clearing, from which sounds came, punctuated by the shrill voiced blasphemy employed by a *mahout* who wished to blame his mistakes on his elephant. There was also the sound of a cross-cut saw. Barking set his teeth as if the noise had put them on edge.

"Did you know it is Sunday?" he asked in a fretful voice.

Bread scratched at the back of his neck with spade shaped fingernails. The movement knocked his helmet to a more immoral angle.

"Hadn't figured on it," he remarked. "My crew works at what needs doin'. 'Tween jobs they can loaf to suit what ails 'em. It's a good crew," he added. "But don't you serve 'em no liquor."

Barking stuffed his hands into his pockets; that appeared to be the symbol of his self-control. He shrugged his shoulders, symbolizing resignation to unpleasant duty, made his breath hiss through his teeth and turned away, leading toward the *neem* trees. Joe Bread followed, taking about one stride to the missionary's two. He looked thoughtful.

It was a considerable clearing on the far side of the *neem* trees. Two elephants dusted themselves in a corner, looking dimly golden in the filtered sunlight. Another elephant, resentful at extra duty imposed after twenty miles of road work, was making a fuss about hauling lengths of squared teak from a big pile to a saw pit. Half a dozen Indian carpenters with native tools were working hard under the eyes of a little white man in a khaki shirt and riding breeches, with a helmet like the one Joe Bread was wearing.

"Stop—I command it!"

Barking had a fine, arresting voice, and indignation made it vibrant. Action ceased instantly. Even the elephants stopped swaying for a moment. There was almost silence. And then Bread, calmly, like a general who knows obedience is absolutely certain, said—

"Spadger, come and meet the reverend."

His eyes met Spadger's as the younger man approached—a rather handsome fellow, gifted with facial lines that made him look like a comedian and masked the steel sincerity that it would probably have bored him to reveal. But his walk betrayed it. He set his feet down accurately. His eyes, as

he glanced at Joe Bread, were about as faithful as a shepherd dog's—grayish brown, quick, intelligent. No other signal passed between them.

"How do you do, Mr. Spadger."

"Glad to know you, Reverend."

"His real name's full of 'Z's' an' 'skis' an' 'W's,' said Joe Bread. "We call him Spadger for short, to save our front teeth. Thirsty work, too, tryin' to pronounce them violin monickers. An' the crew works dry. So we shortened him half the alphabet. He tried to make it legal, but a Jew judge said it weren't good public policy to be so yieldin' toward ignorant prejudice. What do *you* say?"

Barking strained to control un-Christian temper.

"Very interesting, I am sure. But kindly tell me what all this means. That is my teak you are cutting. It was brought here at great expense, and cut to exact lengths, for a new mission building. What are those carpenters doing? How dare they cut my teak without permission?"

" 'Tweren't permission. What they got was orders," Bread said slowly. "Soon as I seen that teak I figured you weren't bluffin' when you cabled Hollywood. Your wire said all we need 'd be ready for us. Time an' tigers wait for no man, Reverend. Cages ain't made in a minute. The stuff was too long to make cages that'll have to be hauled from here to railhead."

Barking almost shouted at him.

"Cages? What do you want cages for?"

"Them tigers."

"I won't hear of it," Barking snapped back. "Murderous brutes! They must be shot. To try to trap them would simply invite calamity. I tell you I won't hear of it."

Bread and Spadger exchanged glances, but neither man smiled.

"We've come a long way, Reverend," said Spadger. "It'd be a shame to miss a bet like this one. Joe here caught a shipload o' wild asses up in Tibet. If a man can catch them, why—tigers is easy."

"Nonsense!" Barking answered. "I will not be swayed against my judgment. There are children in the mission. I refuse to be responsible for prolonging their peril one unnecessary moment. I withdraw my stipulation about the skins; you may have them. But if you need live tigers, go and catch them elsewhere."

Joe Bread shifted his tobacco to the other cheek.

"I get you," he said gently. "I understand your viewpoint. But look at mine. I'd be tickled to bits to sell short half a dozen carloads o' the ordinary tiger—say ten to the carload—at two thousand dollars a bunch, boxed separately, F.O.B. Calcutta. Get me? But a pair o' white ones—geez!" His eyes narrowed a trifle. "Can you guess what they'd be worth, delivered, fat an' sassy, *an'* a reel or two o' shots that show 'em sportin' in their habitat? You've got to see sense, Reverend."

BARKING had sense to discern that indignation would only amuse this man of mercenary motives. Bread looked down at him coolly, calmly, evidently studying him but in no way baffled by the problem.

"I appreciate your point of view," he answered. "Two white tigers might be worth a lot of money. I admit that."

"Mates?" asked Joe Bread.

"Yes, yes, male and female."

"Geez!" said Bread and Spadger, almost with the same voice.

Barking winced.

"I have even dallied," he said, "with the thought of trapping them. But they have killed too many people. They are a menace that must be destroyed. But I wish to be fair. I thought of this. I understand some of the tricks employed in making motion pictures. So suppose you let your cameraman take several reels of pictures of the mission. That would be good educational stuff, and you

could depend on us to turn our best face to the camera. Then, after you have shot the tigers, you can photograph them and include them in the picture. Men of your experience undoubtedly could set them up and make them lifelike. You might even catapult one off a springboard to provide the necessary action. We could write a whole story around those tigers. I have dozens of scenarios that I have written in my spare time."

"Oh, yeah?"

"Yes, I mean it."

Bread's eyes flashed a glance at Spadger's, as if he needed inspiration. But the younger man kept silence.

"Prob'ly I'm a sinful man accordin' to your standards," Bread observed. But sin, it seemed, sat easy on his shoulders. "I don't hold with wearin' out my knees in church. An' preachin' never sounded half as good to me as the noise o' somethin' bein' done that needed fixin'. Prob'ly God an' me ain't hittin' it. But shoot two white tigers—mates? No, *sir!* Not if I can catch 'em."

Barking hesitated—too long. It was the same thing as admitting Joe Bread's right to an opinion. Almost, by a moment's silence, he admitted that his own opinion might contain a flaw. He tried to get the upper hand.

"You have your principles?" he answered. "But you cut my teak on Sunday?"

Spadger cut in:

"Tigers, Reverend—how about tigers in Sunday School? They attend reg'lar?"

Barking snorted.

Joe Bread handed out an ultimatum:

"Me an' you can hit it off first rate, Reverend. I'm a reasonable man. I'm hopin' you are. I'm to ketch them tigers an' I'll pay you for that teak. It may be we was optimistic in interpretin' your cablegram to mean what any smart man might suppose it meant. If I ketch 'em, them tigers'll belong to the comp'ny. We'll pay you f'r damages, wear an' tear of anything o' yours we use, an' any reasonable claim you set up. An' we'll pay the reg'lar rate o' wages for day labor. But we'll need help. Do I look to you for that? Or do I rustle what I'm needin' elsewhere?"

"Speaking without prejudice," said Barking, "it appears to me that the mission should own at least a half interest in those tigers—that is to say, if I should agree to let you try to trap them. But I don't agree to it."

" 'Pearances are often pie eyed," Joe Bread answered. "Ketch 'em yourself, an' I'll buy 'em off you. Shoot 'em an' keep 'em. To hell with their hides—I want 'em pert an' pretty on the hoof."

"I understand you," said Barking. "But I don't think you understand me."

"Oh, yeah?"

Barking made a tight mouth, and his eyes were angry, but he bridled wrath and tried diplomacy.

"Well," he said, "I can't allow work on Sunday. You have done your damage. It is too late to repair that. Please instruct your men to put away their tools. After that, if you will come with me to the house I will ask Mrs. Barking to give you breakfast."

Joe Bread turned to Spadger.

"Did you hear him?"

Spadger walked away toward the saw pit—slowly. He drew a folded foot-rule from his pocket, dropped it carelessly and glanced back as he turned to pick it up. Joe Bread's left eye winked once. There was no more noise of sawing until Joe Bread and the missionary, striding side by side, had covered a third of a mile of the track that led toward the neat, flower bordered mission buildings.

CHAPTER II

"Settin' a mount as wilful as me'd be uneconomic."

JOE BREAD, sniffing like a bird dog, stamped the dust off his boots on the steps of the broad veranda. A brassy bell was clanging not far off. There was a drone of mud wasps and a

smell of furniture polish, but another smell also. A darkened, cool, big living room revealed itself as Barking led the way in—new linoleum, piano, mail order furniture, mission made mats in profusion, a sectional bookcase, portraits framed in brown lacquer, flowers in brass bowls . . .

Barking hesitated.

"You have caught us unprepared," he said after a moment. "There is Sunday School; I can't neglect that. Mrs. Barking has her duties too. However, I will ask her to entertain you."

He glanced at a stiff backed chair, as if hinting that dust and sweat off Bread's shirt might soil those that had chintz covers. However, Bread took an armchair and sprawled in it, reached for a book, discovered it was something about mission management and set it down again. Barking went into another room and Bread heard whispering; it continued for several minutes. Then Barking brought his wife in.

She was taller than her husband—rather big boned and wholesome looking. She was dressed quite plainly, with a long skirt. She had big, dark brown eyes and a smile that looked as if it had the goods behind it.

"Mr. Joe Bread—Mrs. Barking."

"Huh," Bread answered. "Ioway." He glanced around the room and grinned at her. "I see you read the ads in all the magazines."

She shook hands and they liked each other, slightly to Barking's dismay. However, Barking excused himself, saying he was already late for Sunday School, and Joe Bread watched him through the door, then winked at Mrs. Barking.

"What do you mean by that?" she asked him.

"Reverend's upset," he answered. "Him an' me are holdin' two ends o' one shovel, so the shovelin' ain't good—yet."

"Aren't you a little previous?" She sat down and he sat beside her on the same chintz covered davenport. "He tells me you have already been cutting up expensive teak without so much as asking."

"Sis," he said, "them tigers, if accounts are true, was previouser by a heap. I'm on comp'ny business an' I'm paid to hustle. You can easy understand that if I ketch them cats I'll need a couple o' crates like heathens need salvation. Won't be time to wire Sears Roebuck for canary cages. Tigers has to be crated quick. Now them two—are they man-eaters?"

"I believe not. They are very big, and almost snow-white, but not old—probably just full grown."

"You seen 'em?"

"Oh, yes. They jumped into the road within fifty feet of me. Beautiful things."

"You run?"

"What would have been the use? Perhaps I was too terrified to run. At any rate, I stood still and they looked at me for I don't know how long. Then they jumped up the bank and disappeared. One of them has a claw missing from its right hind foot."

"How do you know that?"

"I examined the footprints."

"Sister, me an' you are goin' to hit it off first rate. I've paid a heap o' money in my day to men who figured 'emselves tough an' would ha' been too scared to look at anything but where the hell to git to."

"Could you swear a little less?" she asked him.

"Sis, I could do almost anything to please you. How long since them cats fed?"

"Yesterday. They killed a bullock."

"Kill a man lately?"

"Not for ten days. But they hurt the bullock driver. If you'll come, I'll show you. Breakfast won't be ready for several minutes. If I'd only known—"

"You'd have fed me home eats. Yeah, I'll bet on it. An' I'd ha' stuffed myself so full I'd ha' pleased the reverend by settin' still all day Sunday."

"Won't you come to morning ser-

vice?" she asked over her shoulder, leading along a passage to a rear door.

"I'll be there if them tigers are."

She paused in the doorway to take a horse-tail fly switch from its hook. Their eyes met.

"He would like it," she said. "It would be tactful to go."

"Sister, I git paid five hundred bucks a week for knowin' how to snap straight into what needs doin'. If I let the reverend suspect he has me buffaloed, he'd ride me raw."

"Do you propose to ride him?"

Bread chuckled.

"No, ma'am. And settin' a mount that's as wilful as me would be uneconomic. If you'll pardon me for being truthful, he's a liability as far as his job assays. Figurin' on liabilities as assets gets you in the red the same as spendin' dough on whoopee."

SHE paused in a garden, where the path led toward a gate in the wall, between flaming thickets of hibiscus.

"Do you expect me to help you manage him?" she asked.

Bread's eyes smiled.

"Sister, any time I see some one doin' a job workman-like an' smooth, I take a back seat. How long have you been here?"

"Seven years," she answered.

"He was here first?"

"Three years before I came."

"And when you came, was it like this?"

"Not exactly."

"I would bet my job it wasn't. First you gentled him, an' then you broke him, tactful an' diplomatic, makin' him believe he bosses you. He hasn't found out yet whose ring is in his nose, an' I'm the last who'll tell him. Was it you who wised him up to cable Hollywood?"

"I was afraid of accidents," she answered. "He is full of courage, but he is not expert with a rifle."

Joe Bread stared into her truthful eyes and shot a sudden question at her—

"Why does he want them tigers shot?"

"They are dangerous."

"Yeah. So is spite; it's dangerouser. He's an amateur. He don't know how to swing spite by the tail end while he socks it to some one. An' if ever I seen spite all het up an' bein' framed into a boomerang, may I be doublecrossed by a tame monkey if it isn't what's eatin' him this minute."

"You are mistaken. He is very patient—not spiteful at all. Would a spiteful man have asked you to the house to breakfast, after seeing what you have done to his lumber?"

"Them tigers, sis—suppose we shoot 'em. Who would eat crow?"

"Oh, that—"

"Uh-huh."

"They are supposed to be sacred tigers."

"Now we're gettin' at it."

"Padma Sang-jee is a person for whom we have very little respect."

"We—meanin' the reverend—an' who else? You in on it?"

"My husband objects to any one posing as a magician. So he made trouble for Padma Sang-jee, who was living in an ancient ruin in the forest. He had him turned out by the forest officer. Then Padma Sang-jee had the impudence to come here and threaten reprisals. After that, when a building burned down it was rumored that Padma Sang-jee sent the lightning that set it on fire. When the smallpox came he boasted openly that it was he who sent it. Last year drought and insects ruined all our crops; he claimed he sent those.

"Now he says these are his tigers, and he boasts he has made them invulnerable. He says they can't be killed, and that they will stay here and do more and more damage until we go away. So the damage is laid at our door, for having offended Padma Sang-jee, and even our converts are discouraged; several have left us."

"Sayin' amen's easier than usin' your

intelligence," Bread commented. "Why in hell not slip the devil-doctor a piece of change? That's all them racketeers want. Geez—you'd ha' had him ropin' in converts at so much a head. Did no one think of it?"

She did her best to look stern, but it was difficult to do that under Joe Bread's penetrating gaze. She had a sense of humor, and he knew it, and she knew he did.

"My husband would never dream of paying bribes," she said. Then she suddenly changed the subject. "Come along and see the bullock driver, or your breakfast will get lukewarm."

Joe Bread scratched under his helmet as if memory lay in the roots of his hair.

"Magic?" he said. "Graft? Them's two sides o' one racket as a gen'ral rule. Sis—have you noticed that a punch in the nose stays by you longer than what you read out of books?"

She eyed him curiously, sidewise.

"No one ever punched my nose."

He smiled.

"I meant that metaphorical. When you said lukewarm, it brought to mind a man named Luke who smacked me for a home run. He was runnin' a graft an' I horned in."

"This way—you will have to jerk the gate; it catches—what did you do?"

"Studied on it. But I'm thinkin' o' them tigers." He sniffed thoughtfully, as he had done when he stopped on the porch. "I'll bet you both them tigers against the middle of a doughnut that—yeah, I'll bet you."

"What? It might be fun to bet. I make marvelous doughnuts."

"Go ahead, sis. Make a raft of 'em. It's a bet, an' you'll lose."

"But what are we betting about—and on Sunday?"

"I remember it was Sunday when I stopped that wallop on the snoot. I'm bettin' that when you spoke of Luke you put a notion into my head that'll fix them tigers—an'—"

"I am listening. And what?"

"There'll be fixin's to spare."

"For whom?"

"Meddlers."

She stood still until he had slammed the gate in the wall behind them. Then she met his eyes—defiantly, but with perfect good humor.

"Mr. Bread, I'm quite a fighter for my own crowd."

"Oh, yeah? All right, sister. Get goin'. Me an' you are partners. Any one who licks us two is goin' to know he *might* ha' picked somethin' easier . . . Is that the hospital?"

CHAPTER III

"Padma Sang-jee is the joker in this deck."

SPADGER, nervous as a terrior, suddenly faced about as Joe Bread's long shadow preceded him into the clearing. They met in the stump encumbered center, in full sunlight.

"How about breakfast?" Spadger asked.

"All set. I've had mine. Got the stuff cut?"

"Yep."

"Pack it on them elephants an' get the hell from here before the reverend gets through preachin'. There's a bozo bringin' coffee for you an' a pail of home eats. He's a convert. Sure as death an' taxes he'll hotfoot it back with the dope on us. So load up."

"O. K. But I seen a tiger."

"White?"

"Yep. Close up. Could have hit him with the automatic—easy."

"If you had, I'd slap you for a goal. Good lookin'?"

"Geez—pretty as a panther. Color of ermine fur—sort of symptom of golden yellow mixed in, makin' the white look whiter. Stripes a sort of darker white, I'd call it."

"Big?"

"Hell—outsize. Fat an' snooty. Scared o' nothin'."

"Male?"

"No. Female— Hey, you, Mahommed, snap right into it an' load that cut stuff on to all three elephants . . . Where'll we haul the stuff, Joe?"

"Cache it handy—just out o' the reverend's reach, that's all. I've got the lowdown on this layout. Tiger huntin', or just prowlin' for a look-see?"

"Curious, I reckon. Mebbe two parts full o' mischief. Funny thing was, elephants weren't panicky. An' see them goats? There's fifty of 'em nibblin' sprouts at the edge o' the jungle. Took no notice. Weren't scared."

"Goats see the tiger?"

"Saw an' smelt him. They was down o' what wind's movin'."

"Get this—" Joe Bread cut himself a fresh chew. "Mrs. Barkin' saw 'em—two together—saw 'em close up. She weren't scared enough to stop her lookin' at their tracks the minute they'd cleared out. She's from the top o' the deck. I'm for her. She don't stick her hands up easy. *But*—them tigers killed two bullocks an' ripped hell out o' the driver. He's in hospital. I seen him just now. He says the bullocks weren't scared worth a damn. He says the tigers ran alongside, an' the bullocks took no notice until both cats jumped 'em simultaneous.

"He says, too, that he weren't scared worth mentionin' until he scrambled out from where he was pitched between the bullocks—an' they kickin' to beat hell. He weren't so scared he didn't know which tiger swatted him. He says the female did it—cat an' mouse style—playful. So he played dead."

"All them savages is liars," Spadger commented.

"Yeah—'ceptin' when you count on 'em lyin'. There's a kid there standin' herd o' them goats. How did *he* act?"

"Casual," said Spadger.

"An' the carpenters?"

"Stoopid. They laughed like a lot o' monkeys. I cussed 'em for layin' off work an' they went right to it."

"You?"

"I'm always scared. I'm scared o' my own shadow."

"Go to hell," said Joe Bread. "There's a bozo name o' Padma Sang-jee, actin' joker in this deck. He's a magician. Him an' me are due to talk horse. Mebbe I'll need an interpreter. Was you in Carson City, time when Chris Luke let me have it on the beak?"

"You've a mem'ry. Who sat up three nights changin' the ice on your blasphemous mug? But what has Chris Luke got to do with it?"

"Chew on it an' guess," said Joe Bread. "Chris Luke's punch I stopped had ought to assay somethin' after nine years. Here's your breakfast. Get the hell from here soon as you're loaded—an' soon as you've cached that timber bring your camera an' come an' find me. Pitch camp where we'll have it peaceful—not too far off from the mission, nor yet far from the lumber."

He took paper rupees from his wallet—two tens and a five.

"Where'll you be at?" asked Spadger.

Bread grinned.

"Where would any good guy be at on Sunday? Alibi-in' you, you heathen. I'll act pious for the whole crew. Get a move on— Hey, you, wait a minute."

HE OVERTOOK the mission servant, who had set down cans of marvelous smelling food and then hurried away after staring at what Spadger's crew were doing.

"What's your rush?" he asked. "Are you the deacon?"

"Sahib, I am houseboy."

"Oh, yeah? Educated? Read? Write? Figure? Sort o' wasted on a job o' flunkeyin', I'd say. What d'ye draw down?"

"Sahib?"

"What's the pay check?"

"If you please, sir—?"

"Get good wages?"

"Nine rupees monthly, sahib."

"Uh-huh. Three bucks. How much of it do you spend on perfume? You smell wonderful. Never mind; I was lookin' for a man at twenty-five per to

act private secret'ry. Mrs. Barkin' said it's difficult to find jobs for you educated bozos. What's your name?"

"Govind, sahib."

"Uh-huh. Govind was the guy she said talks some o' the dialects hereabouts. Might that be you, or are there two o' that name?"

"I talk many speeches. I am the only Govind."

"Oh, yeah? But she said you're no good as an all-around interpreter. For instance, you can't talk Padma Sang-jee's language. It's for that I'd offer twenty-five dibs."

"But I speak it, sahib."

"Uh-huh? What are you scared of? Seen them tigers?"

Govind seemed to shrink within the long white smock that was the livery of his calling. The whites of his eyes spread. Horror enlarged them; or it might be suspicion.

"You seen 'em?" Joe Bread repeated.

"No—yes, I have seen them."

"Which are you scared of—them or Padma Sang-jee?"

Govind did not answer. Joe Bread took a sudden long stride and turned about facing him, blocking the path.

"I said *private* secret'ry. Do you savvy the word private? Twenty-five rupees per. That talks, don't it? 'Private' means that you don't tell my business an' I don't tell yours. I don't tell the reverend, for instance, that you're gettin' pay from me as well as him. You understand that? Here's a month's graft. Count it."

Govind's fingers closed on paper money. Joe Bread's eyelids closed, too, less perceptibly. His stare was like a crocodile's—narrower—steady as stone; but there was fire behind it.

"An' I don't tell any one that you an' this guy Padma Sang-jee are two of a kind. I don't let on that you're his information man."

"But, sahib—"

"Don't you lie to me, you savage! Mrs. Barkin's told me you was transferred from the hospital for havin' told folks in there that them tigers are supernatural an' sent to claw hell out o' converts. You'd been sayin' it since first the tigers showed up. What would you say that for, unless Padma Sang-jee—"

"I don't know him, sahib."

"Oh, yeah? An' you don't talk his language, either? An' you're not so crazy-scared o' bein' found out that you turned into a white crow at the name o' him an' two white tigers? Come clean. What are you usin' scent for? Damn your hide, don't dare to lie to me now. 'Fess up. Are you Padma Sang-jee's spy or aren't you?"

"No, sahib."

Joe Bread's fist moved seven inches. He looked down at the sprawling Hindu.

"Are you Padma Sang-jee's man or aren't you?"

"Yes, sahib."

"Get up. Don't you dare to lie to me again, you sucker. You got an aunt?"

"No."

"Mother?"

"No, sahib. Only father living."

"Where at?"

"Two hours' walking distance."

"What's the matter with him?"

"Nothing."

"O.K. Was you in that hospital a year an' nine months?"

"Yes, sahib."

"So you know what a wound from a tiger looks like?"

"I have dressed them, sahib."

"O.K. Listen to me then. Your papa was clawed up by a tiger shortly after daybreak this A.M. You get that? Some one met you with an accurate description o' the details an' then beat it, after tellin' you to hustle to your old man's bedside. So you ask for immediate leave of absence to see papa. Get that?"

"Yes, sahib."

"An' instead o' that, where do you go?"

"I don't know, sahib."

"You're a bright secret'ry, you are. You go hotfoot to this Padma Sang-jee bozo. Get that?"

"Yes, sahib."

"An' you say to him—what?"

"How should I know? I am not God. Can I read thoughts?"

"Quicker'n hell you read 'em when I slap you! Do you want to stop another one? No? Well, tell this Padma Sang-jee that a friend o' his hit town an' wants to see him private. Get it? Private, same as you're a private secret'ry—an' gettin' well paid. Tell him money oozes out o' me like sweat out of a nigger.

"Tell him, if he don't come, friends has ways o' bein' friendly that'd make a pain in the neck seem like money from home. Tell him to come to my camp. Tell him, if he don't come, he'll be up against trouble. An' so will you be. I don't pay a secret'ry the wages of a high commissioner to have him fall down on his first job. You come with him. Get a move on. Git, now. Git, quick."

Bread waited until Govind reached the mission. He chewed tobacco thoughtfully until he saw the white robed figure leave the side gate at a jogtrot. Then he nodded to himself and made his own way leisurely toward the buildings, sniffing.

CHAPTER IV

"I want that rifle. I want it quick—before trouble breaks loose."

THERE was a tennis court, then a vegetable garden, then a long, low building used as workshops for the mission industries; that building made one side of a quadrangle, of which the other three sides were the chapel, the school and dormitories for the convert children. There were beautiful trees, well spaced and cared for, and it was all as neat and clean as if finished yesterday. Joe Bread entered through a wide gate at the southwest corner, leaned his back against a tree and waited, sniffing again. A big cracked bell in a painted belfry on the chapel roof clanged discordantly, but he hardly noticed that. His nose monopolized his full attention—nose and eyes.

There was a cat behaving scandalously. It sprang from a schoolroom window ledge and rolled in a bed of flowers as a wet dog rolls in carrion. Joe Bread left the tree and sniffed the flower bed, then the windowsill. Presently he walked around the quadrangle, examining each tree in turn and various other details. Three of the gates, one at each corner of the quadrangle, were closed with chains and padlocks; but the gate he had entered by stood swung against the wall and had not been closed for a long time; there were traces of moss on the bed of the grooved arc it had made in the gravel. He sniffed the gravel, his untidy eyebrows curving into query marks.

There was singing in one of the schoolrooms, not exactly musical or even satisfying, but well drilled. It was as uninspired as that of almost any children forced to sing in chorus what their elders think suitable. There was a regulation Sunday morning atmosphere, and nothing in the least unusual except that vague, elusively familiar smell that made Joe Bread's nostrils twitch inquisitively.

Singing ceased. The chapel bell stopped ringing. Joe Bread's tongue transferred his chew from one cheek to the other. There was a sudden stir of benches jerked back by children getting to their feet in unison. Out through a schoolroom door, by twos, and very well behaved, came the Sunday School class—girls in front, boys following—conducted by seven teachers, four of them women, and by several native assistant teachers.

The girls were in clean white frocks; the boys wore freshly laundered cotton coats and trousers. Barking came last, as black as a crow in ministerial garb

that evidently caused him acute discomfort. He looked tortured—red faced and angry. He had tucked a strip of surgical lint between his neck and collar to keep the latter from absorbing sweat, and it made him look untidy and as self-conscious as a man with a boil. When he paused to lock the classroom door he dropped a big report book and a sheaf of notes. That made him angrier.

Joe Bread strolled toward him, but not in a direct line; he covered about two-thirds of the arc of a circle in order to pass close to the pupils. He sniffed repeatedly. Being sniffed at annoyed them, and he noticed the annoyance, but he went on sniffing just the same, until at last he brought up face to face with Barking.

"Your shirt smell like theirs?" he asked him.

"You must pardon me; we are on our way to morning service," Barking answered.

"So I noticed. Tigers are struttin' their stuff, too. My man saw one where the goats are grazin'."

Barking spoke excitedly:

"Did he shoot it? Did he try to shoot it?"

"On Sunday?" Joe Bread smiled down, hands in his hip pockets, genially aggravating. "Who does your laundry, Reverend?"

"Really, Mr. Bread, I have no time for—"

"Tigers, Reverend. You want all them scholars clawed up?"

THE procession filed into the chapel. Mrs. Barking came out through a dormitory door, stood still a moment in the shade of the veranda, sensed trouble and came to deal with it, raising a combative sunshade. Barking saw her coming and his irritation increased; he appeared to prefer to do his own commanding of a situation. Joe Bread encouraged him to it.

"She'll tell me," he said, with a jerk of his head toward her that was meant to be exasperating. It achieved its purpose.

"This is not the time or place to talk about the mission laundry," Barking insisted. "What has our laundry to do with tigers?"

"Search me, Reverend. But you've been shut up in a schoolroom with a bunch o' future saints that smell like buzzards, an' I'm wonderin'. It's either their religion or the laundry. You say."

"Mr. Bread, your remarks are offensive."

"Oh, yeah? So are tigers, Reverend. Some bozo has been stewin' trouble. Maybe I can fix it—"

Mrs. Barking approached with a step she had certainly learned before she had dreamed of mission work. It was as modest and as full of potential dynamite as Bob Fitzsimmons' stalking of an adversary in the ring.

"Rabbit punches barred," said Joe Bread, grinning, nodding to her. "Break clean. What's wrong with the laundry?"

His face was an enigma. He let Barking see him wink at Barking's wife. That puzzled both of them. But of the two, she had the better judgment, so she answered civilly:

"I don't know. All the dormitory sheets smell dreadful. Why did you wink at me?"

"Sorry," Joe Bread answered. "I forgot it's Sunday. I was thinkin' o' them tigers. They might 'tend the mornin' service."

"Are you mocking us?" Barking demanded.

"Ever smell valerian?" asked Joe Bread.

Barking sputtered and began to walk toward the chapel. Joe Bread stopped him with a gesture.

"This whole quadrangle stinks o' valerian. So do the scholars."

Barking winced perceptibly.

"What has Govind to do with the laundry?" Joe Bread asked him.

"Nothing."

"Uh-huh? Him an' me was close up. Why don't he smell like all the rest of 'em?"

"Tell us what you mean," said Mrs. Barking. "Govind is a houseboy. He has nothing to do with the laundry. He has gone to see his father, who was injured by a tiger."

"That is the first I heard of it," Barking snapped back. "He should be in chapel."

Joe Bread eyed him curiously.

"Could I see the laundry?" he asked. "Where is it?"

"The laundry is locked on Sunday," Barking answered.

Joe Bread shifted irritants.

"I figure I'll send for a camera an' shoot them scholars comin' out of chapel," he remarked. "They look right elevatin'."

"Not on Sunday! I will not allow commerce on Sunday."

Organ music boomed out through the chapel windows. Love of punctuality made Barking almost frantic. Joe Bread irritated him again by turning to his wife and changing his voice in inflection.

"Guns in the house?" he asked her. "Mine ain't handy. I ain't goin' to shoot the reverend."

Barking hurried away. He made a gesture to his wife that might be a command to follow him, or might be permission to do as she pleased. She waited for him to get out of earshot. Suddenly he changed his mind and turned back.

"Mr. Bread, I may as well inform you now as later that I don't intend to employ your services. My offer to your company is canceled. I shall write and tell them why I canceled it. Your attitude toward me is an outrage."

He had turned on his heel and was gone before Bread could answer him, but Mrs. Barking stood still.

"Why not tell me what you mean?" she asked.

"Sis, if I was as sure o' my facts as I am o' your good sense, I'd tell you. How many guns has the reverend got?"

"One."

"What sort?"

"It's a combination shotgun and rifle."

"May I have it?"

"What for?"

"My man Spadger has mine. Sis, you'd better trust me. There's a damn fool dealin' with a fool crook. Trouble's comin'. I'm a trouble fixer. Me an' you should play this hand together."

"Very well, but tell me."

"I did. I want that rifle. I want it quick, before trouble cuts loose."

"I believe you are plotting against my husband. He offended you. You want to make him look ridiculous."

JOE BREAD'S eyes challenged her to read the answer in his own. She refused to let hers betray her. She was loyal; nothing could make her admit that Barking needed no help to make himself absurd. But her mouth twitched.

"Sis, I'm after tigers. I won't hurt *him,* nohow."

"Promise?"

"If he rattles me, I'll think o' you an' let him get away with anything this side o' murder."

"Can I trust you?"

"'Pends on your experience o' people."

She let the sunshade come between them, then raised it suddenly and stared hard.

"Very well. I must be quick; I'm late for service. Come this way."

She led him through the dormitory door. There was another door on the far side opening on a yard, whose end wall, with a high gate, screened from view all but the roof of the mission house. There was a servant pulling sheets off beds and heaping them all in a basket. The smell was not exactly unclean, but it was disagreeable.

"Those sheets," she said, "were clean last night—and so were the children. I can't understand it."

"Me neither—not yet," Joe Bread answered.

She ordered the servant to go with him to the house and give him Barking's rifle.

"Has he a pistol?" Joe asked.

"No."

"Sure?"

"Quite sure. Why?"

"No matter."

"Don't forget now. I agreed to trust you."

Joe Bread followed the servant—an old man with iron-gray hair under his turban. When he opened the gate in the wall Joe shot a question at him.

"Christian?"

"No, sahib."

"Heathen, are you? Who made all that stink there in the dormitory?"

The old man shook his head.

"*Cutcha,*" he answered. "No good."

He appeared distressed about it and afraid of something, but he said no more until they reached the house, where Joe Bread waited outside. When he came out with the rifle and a bag of cartridges he put the rifle into Joe's hands with an air of almost blessing him. Muttering, he slung the cartridge bag over Joe's shoulder. All he said aloud was:

"*Bagh*—tu-tigers—not good. You good sahib. You shoot. Very good."

Joe Bread offered him a rupee. He refused it.

"On the level, are you? O.K."

Instead of following the old man back through the gate in the wall toward the dormitory, Joe Bread stood examining the rifle. Presently he looked into the cartridge bag and found an inner pocket containing a can of oil, some waste and cleaning implements. There was a small screwdriver. He took off the plate of the lock and carefully removed a small part of the trigger mechanism. Then he screwed the plate back.

After that he hesitated — started away and turned back. Presently he shouted and a servant came out through the front door. Joe Bread wiggled the rifle trigger.

"Take it," he said. "It's out of order. No good."

He gave him the rifle and cartridge bag and watched him take them indoors. Then he walked away, hands in his pockets, whistling low and sibilantly through his front teeth with his jaw set forward.

CHAPTER V

"Tigers are TNT by telegram collect."

BETWEEN two trees, two or three hundred yards away, a shadow slowly changed into an elephant —perceptible because its swaying was out of time with the shadows of branches moving in the light wind. Spadger was perched on the elephant. He made a sign to Joe Bread, moving his arm in the arc of a circle until it pointed at a clump of bushes beside the road that led, beyond the tennis court, toward the main gate of the mission.

It was a narrow road, well kept but winding, half invisible from where Bread stood, owing to the lumpy nature of the intervening ground. There were feathery trees near the bushes at which Spadger pointed. Monkeys in the trees were chattering and nervously excited; but although the wind was toward the elephant, she stood as stock-still as elephants ever do, appearing troubled about nothing. Her *mahout,* on her neck, looked alertly around, as if afraid of shadows.

Bread strolled toward the elephant, his eyes on Spadger.

"Move the bull a mile away," he ordered in a low voice as soon as he was near enough. "There'll be trouble enough as it is, unless we're pretty slick. Bring your camera down an' let me have your automatic."

Spadger tossed the pistol to him. Bread unloaded it.

"Are they both there?"

"Yes," said Spadger. "Beauts. But what's the idea?" He let himself down by the elephant's tail and the *mahout*

passed down the camera. "Them cats are huntin'. I never seen tigers act that way. They're behavin' like dogs on a queer scent. Take my tip an' load that gun again. They're as playful as TNT, them two. They're full o' 'that's the kind o' guys *we* are.' "

Joe Bread handed him the empty pistol. He put the clip of shells into his own pocket.

"Sunday," he answered. "I been prayin' to be kep' out o' temptation, an' you was in on that. I wore my knees out. Give that bull her marchin' orders."

Spadger spoke to the *mahout* in murdered Hindustanee—grammar and pronunciation butchered in the name of unmistakable directness. The *mahout* grinned and the elephant majestically moved into the shadows, swaying away like an episode out of a dream.

"Have it your own way. Now, what?"

Spadger hitched his burden, adjust- the camera strap to his shoulders. He had a full sized aluminum tripod, but the camera was not much larger than the kind they sell to tourists.

"Safety first," said Joe Bread. "You do what I tell you—an' no hedgin' bets."

"Oh, yeah? You turnin' pious?"

"Uh-huh. Watch them monkeys."

"Tigers have turned back by the look of it."

"No they haven't. Them monks are cussin' 'cause there ain't no trees to follow by. You watch 'em. As soon as them tigers have gone far enough to make it safe, you'll see the monks go scamperin' toward that bunch o' trees nearer the mission. They're like fans at a prizefight, Spadger. They sure do love bawlin' out a big guy from a safe place. There they go. See 'em."

Joe Bread strode away in the direction of the tennis court and Spadger followed, neither of them taking elementary precautions against being seen.

"Set your camera here," said Joe Bread. "We're downwind of 'em. They're followin' the road. You'll get a long shot where you see that fifty feet o' road between them hillocks."

"Hell, they'll see *us*."

"Hope so. That'll stop 'em for a minute. You'll get footage. I'll be lookin' t'other way. They're used to seein' laborers at work. If we act unconcerned they'll carry on, if that scent they're followin' is half as hot as I suspect. Look out now—there they come! Geez, what a couple o' lils!"

The camera purred for sixty seconds, timed by Spadger's heartbeat.

"Too far off," he grumbled. " 'Twon't amount to nothin'. But they're lookin' this way. Geez—look out, Joe, they're after us!"

Joe Bread did not even turn to look. He moved leisurely.

"Leave your camera," he said, "and take it easy. Come alongside me. Now —both of us walk slow as if we never heard o' tigers. Don't look back, you sucker. Soon as they're done rubberin' at the camera, they'll go on about their business."

"Hell, they're killers!"

"That's why. Camera don't smell o' what they're after. They've been gettin' what they went for, them two, week after week. They'll head back for the scent as soon as they discover we're not huntin' 'em. If you want to get killed, you sucker, turn your head an' look back."

JOE BREAD jumped into a quarry where the gravel had been dug for road work. Spadger followed. Both of them scrambled around the quarry face and crawled out, fifty feet away, between two bushes. Spadger, thrusting himself forward on his hands and knees, very gradually raised his eyes above the level of a low ridge.

"I can't see 'em."

"Watch the monkeys."

"Say, it's you needs watchin'," Spadger answered. "Chances you take'd ha' done you in ages ago if you hadn't the luck of a lott'ry winner. One o' these days soon you'll get what Chris Luke

handed you—an' then some."

"Get your camera. There'll be worse than a broken nose if you don't listen to your Uncle Dudley."

"Meanin' you?"

"Says I."

"You preach too much." Spadger hoisted his camera. "You should be preachin' the reverend's sermon for him. See where them tigers are goin'? Talk won't do a thing to this mess."

"Wisht I had an ordinary bent wood chair," said Joe Bread. "I've seen Curley in a cage with two Mongolians. All he had was a chair and a pistol loaded with blanks. He licked 'em."

"Maybe. But it was tigers at last that finished Curley."

Joe Bread studied Spadger half a second, sidewise.

"Most of us," he said, "die somehow. Do you reckon they'll have to shoot you dead on Judgment Day to separate you from your carcass?"

"Go on. Get us both killed."

Joe Bread studied him again.

"Your nerves," he answered, "for a cam'ra man, are lousy. You should ha' been in the sidewalk tintype racket. Two-bits—paper frame free."

"That so? You'll say next I've stuck to you for ten years for the motherin' you give me. Maybe I'm on the payroll for the sake o' the times I've ditched you in a tight place."

Joe Bread chuckled.

"Tigers ain't a tight place, Spadger. Tigers are TNT by telegram collect."

"You tryin' to scare me?" Spadger asked him.

"I crave comp'ny. I'm as scared as you are."

"You liar!"

"Watch 'em! There they go! See 'em? Geez, that's pretty!" Bread climbed a low ridge, not changing the time of his stride. He leaned against a scrubby thorn tree, staring toward the tennis court and the open mission gate beyond it. "Some one's laid a trail o' stewed valerian, and catnip's nothin' to it. Spadger, we'll trap 'em like mice when the time comes."

"Hell, you'll trap 'em. Bet you fifty bucks the reverend shoots 'em as they sneak in."

"What with? A hymn book? I busted his pop-gun. Geez, look at that! Can you beat it?"

Spadger had no time to answer. He was busy. Two white tigers rolling in a dusty road less than fifty paces from a gate, with a dark brick wall for background and the sunlight making them as sharp as living cameos, was too much for his nerves to fret about; they yielded to the iron law, which says the cameraman shall take pictures. The camera purred.

"They're drunk on the dope," said Joe Bread.

"You was drunk, you big stiff, when you ordered me to take that teak the hell from here. Now how'll we catch 'em? Where's your cages? No net—nothin'."

"Sunday," Joe Bread answered. "Let the reverend have his innin's. Us, we'll catch 'em on a weekday. Come on."

"Come where?"

"Close up."

"Are you drunk?"

"They're drunk enough to go in, if we head 'em. Place is lousy with valerian. We'll have to work to get 'em out of it."

"Shut the gate and pen 'em in there."

"Then who'd own 'em? Then who'd stop the reverend from sendin' for *shikarris?* They'd pot 'em dead from the roofs."

"All right. What d'you want to head 'em in for?"

"Footage. Close up. Tigers stickin' up a mission. Walk slow, or they'll change their minds an' charge us—or they'll clear out an' we'll miss the shots."

"You're crazy."

"Maybe. But there's one guy crazier than me, an' that's the reverend. Keep close, where you can hear me give orders. There they go— Geez, they're pippins! I'll go first an' take a chance

they're layin' up for us inside the gate. You'll get a few feet if they jump me. I may have to make for the top o' the gate an' the wall. If so I'll try to occupy 'em, an' you run—but shoot all the film you can before you beat it."

Bread went forward with his usual casual stride. Spadger, fifteen paces to the rear, came alertly—cat-like—camera in both hands, ready for anything, almost crying with excitement.

"Durn your fool hide—you'd unload an automatic in the face o' Providence! You'd walk into a den' o' lions an' try to coax 'em hands up! You'll get yours—"

"O.K—all clear! Come a-runnin'!"

Bread's right arm made a forward sweep as if he were casting hounds forward. There was a tall tree—the one he had leaned his back against an hour earlier. He ran to it. Spadger followed.

"Come on, make this snappy."

He crouched. Spadger leaped on his shoulders. Joe straightened himself. Spadger snatched at a branch, swung up and scrambled higher.

"How's that?"

"First class."

"Keep your head now. What we want is pious pictures."

BREAD strolled away from the tree into the sunlight. Not a hundred feet away, close to the schoolroom door, incredible, enormous snow-white tigers sniffed at the threshold—heard him, saw him, sprang around and faced him.

"Camera!" he shouted. Then he gave a yell like a drunken Indian. He threw up his hands in a gesture of horror. He ran—both tigers after him—toward the dormitory. Bread caught a post of the veranda. There were big nails; he used them for footing and swung himself on to the roof. A tiger followed, leaping like calamity in snow-white; almost reached the roof edge; clung for a moment, snarling, with its left paw through the wooden bracket. Joe Bread took his helmet off and struck the tiger in the face three times. The tiger snarled, ears back, and dropped to the ground where its mate crouched like a cat at a bird, tail twitching.

"Did you get that?"

"Hell, yes!"

The old dormitory servant opened the door, stuck his head through, gasped and slammed it shut again. The tigers leaped as if a whip had struck them. Then they weaved and hesitated in the sunlight, snarling, studying how to reach Joe Bread and drag him off the roof.

A face showed through a chapel window—shouted—vanished. Twenty faces suddenly appeared at other windows. The chapel grew full of undisciplined noise. Bread wrenched a piece of fancy woodwork from the roof and threw it—hit the female tiger. Both brutes broke into a flowing, weaving gallop, backward and forward, searching for a foothold by which to reach the roof. They sprang twenty times, more furious each time they failed.

Then Barking crawled out through the belfry with his collar melted and white sun helmet at an angle that made him look dissolute—drunken. He began to crawl along the roof ridge, legs each side of it, until he reached a ventilator, where he stood, holding on.

"Shoot!" he yelled. "Shoot them!" and the faces at the chapel windows—fifty, sixty, a hundred faces—echoed, "Shoot them, mister!"

Joe Bread bawled back through his cupped hands:

"Dassent, Reverend. It's Sunday."

Barking shouted from the chapel roof to some one he could see in the distance:

"Bring my rifle! Bring it through the vestry door and pass it up through the belfry!"

"Plenty o' film?" asked Joe Bread.

"Eighty feet more. Have to change her in a minute."

Spadger looked like nothing human. He was crouching on a long branch, clinging with toes and elbows, balancing

himself as only cameramen and cats can do it.

"Get them faces at the windows! Get the reverend!" Bread yelled.

"Why not!"

The tigers suddenly decided that the quadrangle was no good. They raced for a locked gate, tried to leap it, fought it for a minute as a caged beast wrenches at the bars, and turned away to try another, flowing like streaks of white light past the chapel windows. Shrieks saluted them. They stopped, stared, snarled, tails switching.

"Shoot! Oh, shoot, for God's sake!" Barking shouted.

They were narrow windows, rather high up, but easy enough for a tiger. The faces vanished. Windows slammed shut. Some one inside had awakened discipline. There came the unmistakable sound of a building being emptied swiftly—on the far side, through the vestry. Suddenly the tigers tried the other corner gate, sprang twice at it and turned back. Near the door, one window of the chapel, unlatched, opened itself slowly—hung on faulty hinges. The female tiger crouched—sprang—scrambled for a moment on the sill and jumped in. The male promptly followed. Barking, from the roof ridge, could not see that.

"Where are they now?" he shouted.

Joe Bread bawled back:

"Singin' hymns—it's Sunday." Then he yelled at Spadger, "Get down out o' that an' change film."

He and Spadger met midway between the tree and dormitory—Spadger vinegary-nervous, like a terrier after porcupines, and Joe Bread cold-excited, smiling like a man in the ring, jaw forward. Joe kept his flint eyes on the chapel window during the furious seconds while Spadger changed the film and stowed the used one in the strap-swung camera case. There was a din in chapel like a barrack roughhouse—seats overturning and crashing against each other.

"It's a cinch," said Bread, "they've all beat it an' shut the back door. Can't reach the belfry. How's the reverend to get his rifle? What we want now is a sequence of him stalkin' tigers like a little hero."

"Light inside the chapel will be lousy," Spadger answered.

Barking shouted from the roof ridge:

"Here comes my rifle. One of you men go for it—through the dormitory."

"Come an' get it," Joe Bread answered. "Dormitory door's locked on the inside."

Spadger spoke through the side of his mouth—

"You said you'd broke his pop-gun."

"Yep. But he don't have to know I did it. Catch him comin' down the roof now— Geez, he packs a nerve! I'd hate to do that!"

Barking slid down, heels first, trusting his religion or else luck to stop him when his heels struck the rainwater gutter.

"Told you he was crazier than me. Now—get this."

BARKING lowered himself by his hands from the gutter and peered in through a window. Then he searched with both legs for a foothold, found none, and tried to haul himself back to the roof. But the gutter hurt his fingers and he lacked strength. Joe Bread ran and stood beneath him.

"Kick a pane o' glass out, Reverend. Set your foot in that. Then jump for me—back'ards. I'll catch you."

Barking hesitated—and then did it. Joe Bread caught him below the shoulders and the two went sprawling backward, Barking uppermost; but Bread was on his feet first.

"Fire drill or adagio—which? Me an' you should be in vaudeville. Did you get that, Spadger? Go an' get your gun," he told the missionary.

Barking walked off and then broke into a run when he was sure he was unhurt. In a moment he was beating on the dormitory door with both fists. The door opened gingerly; a servant passed

him out rifle and cartridge bag. The door slammed and the bolt slid with a click and rattle. Barking slipped in a shell and came forward, rifle under his arm.

Inside the chapel the tigers appeared to have gone mad. They were smashing benches—charging up and down and leaping on and off the platform. They made more noise than mad bulls.

"Get this, Spadger. Use my shoulders, Reverend."

Bread crouched against the chapel wall beneath the open window. Barking knelt on the muscular shoulders. Spadger stepped back to get them in focus. Joe Bread straightened himself and Barking thrust the rifle through the window, took aim, pulled the trigger, looked at the rifle and shook the trigger. Then he withdrew the rifle and pulled the window shut, and jumped down.

"Broken!" he said. He looked shamefaced. "I could shoot them easily. The rifle won't work. What now?"

"Comes o' huntin' on a Sunday," Joe Bread answered. "Next is, how to get 'em out o' here afore they hurt 'emselves."

"Are you a madman?" Livid anger stiffened Barking. "I will send for *shikarris* to come and shoot them."

"Reverend, you make me sick," Bread answered. "You, a minister—an' you act hostile on a Sunday. I'm sure shocked at you, I am. Where's the organ?"

"Organ?"

"I said organ! Where is it?" Bread studied Barking's face and listened to the havoc in the chapel. "Bible says that music sooths a savage beast unless my mem'ry's cockeyed."

"Let me send for the *shikarris*."

"Where's that organ?"

"In the organ loft, of course—at this end, if you must know."

"How d'you pump it?"

"In the loft—by hand."

"O.K. It's time to pull the plug, I reckon. Reverend, you're nominated. 'Twon't be dangerous to climb into the loft. I'll hoist you on top o' the porch. You crawl in through that little window. If it's shut fast, bust it. Pump the organ good an' open all the loud stops. Get me? Then give her the works—sudden—twenty or thirty notes at once, staccato; make a noise like hell full o' mules at midnight."

"Take your hand off me," said Barking.

"Little man, I'm tolerant. I'm good at sayin' nothin'—even when a Holy Joe sprays stewed valerian to lure two tigers into Sunday School. I won't tell your wife what you did. But—"

"How dare you say I—"

"Shush-shush. When I say go in an' do it, I mean just that. Shall I count three?"

Barking squared up and threw his head back.

"Damn you!" he retorted. "Damn you! There—do you understand that?"

"Me an' you can understand each other first rate. So step lively."

Bread made a stirrup of his hands and Barking made a virtue of necessity. He scrambled up the chapel porch and broke the little window of the organ loft, then crawled through.

"Spadger, get up on that porch now—snappy! When I let 'em out they'll see the open gate opposite. They'll go for it like rabbits—give you twenty feet o' thriller. Are you ready? Camera!"

THE organ suddenly let out a blast of discord, again and again. It was almost enough to burst the chapel windows. Joe Bread swung the chapel door wide open, crowding himself against the wall behind it. Scandalized, scared, aware of nothing but din more dreadful than an earthquake and of silences over the skyline, two white tigers shot forth, stood for a second blinking at the sunlight, then sped away like greyhounds. Spadger said—

"Got 'em!"

Bread entered the chapel. It was a

wreck. It stank of tigers and valerian. He took a piece of broken bench and threw it at the organ loft to silence the hysterical discord that was worse than sight or smell.

"You're safe now, Reverend."

The noise ceased. Barking peered down from the loft. He let his anger ferment for about a dozen seconds.

"Go away at once," he said then, concentrating venom into four words. "I forbid you to return," he added. Then an agony of indignation burst restraint. He leaned out from the gallery. "You are a devil. Go to hell!"

"On Sunday, Reverend?"

"All this is your fault. You shall pay me for the damage."

"O.K. Sue the comp'ny."

"I will have you arrested."

"O.K."

"You are answerable, from now on, for whatever harm those brutes do."

"Me an' my valerian!" said Joe Bread. "Reverend, aren't you ashamed o' yourself?"

"Are you going?"

"Yeah. I'll come tomorrow or the nex' day an' take pictures o' the mission."

"I forbid it!"

"Mebbe I'll bring them tigers, since you've trained 'em so nice. If I'd known you'd been to all that trouble—"

Mrs. Barking came in—through the dormitory and across the quadrangle. She was not much flustered. She accosted Joe Bread, pointing at him with the handle of her sunshade—

"Do you remember your promise to me?"

"Yep. O.K. He's to get away with anything this side o' murder—even magic. But it would ha' been murder, sis, if them tigers had killed some scholars."

"Go away!" yelled Barking. "You are an infamous impostor!"

"Oh, yeah?" Joe Bread winked at Mrs. Barking. "Was it you who emptied out the chapel, sis? You did a good job."

"Mr. Bread—" began Mrs. Barking.

"I get you, sis. You shush. The reverend's a good man at his own game. He's been buckin' some one else's, that's all. You leave it to me."

"There has been a mistake," she began, but he interrupted:

"I'm a trouble fixer. Don't you let on to a livin' soul that you even suspect what the reverend did."

She nodded. Barking came down from the organ loft.

"Go away," he commanded.

Bread smiled.

"O.K, Reverend. My camp's not far off. Come an' see me any time you're minded."

CHAPTER VI

"You'll die crankin' your camera—"

JOE BREAD sat smoking his pipe in a camp that contained all the essentials but not one single thing superfluous. Spadger having selected the site, it followed there was privacy and no means of approaching unseen. There was a touch of Joe Bread's method in the placing of the camp chairs; they were not near the tents; they were higher up, on a shelf of the cliff that screened the entrance of a little gorge between two foothills.

A stream tumbled into the gorge. There was grass for the elephants, firewood—nothing lacking. The cook's and the carpenter's tents were out of the way but within easy hail. The cook's fire, and another in front of the tents, could be seen from a distance, but the smaller one, near which Joe Bread sat for the sake of the smoke and the glow, was hidden by a boulder from the sight of any one approaching; even its reflection was invisible from lower down.

"I'm tellin' you," said Joe Bread. "You'll die crankin' your camera, the same as a bull dies bustin' matadors. That's why I'm for you, spite o' your bum judgment. Spadger, what you

don't know about human nature 'd fill a public lib'ry o' books. That reverend has made a bad break, an' he knows it. An' he knows I know it. So he'll put one over on us if we don't watch out."

"You're a hell of a wise guy," Spadger grumbled. "Any one'd think, to hear you talk, that you invented brains. If you knew anything you'd speak plain."

Joe Bread stared into the starlit distance.

"Some one's comin'. An' it isn't the bozo I sent for."

"Five," said Spadger. "One's on horseback."

"It's the reverend. You wait here. Sneak up on us if you want to listen in."

Bread vanished into shadow, following a goat track that brought him down presently close to the tents. He stood there, just outside the zone of firelight, covering his pipe bowl with a cupped hand, until a brown mule drew near to the circle of light and the Reverend Mr. Walter Barking jumped to the ground. Four armed men, wearing turbans, grounded the butts of their obsolete guns and one of them took the mule's rein.

"Mr. Bread here?" Barking shouted.

Joe came forward, knocking out his pipe, refilling it and stooping to pick a brand from the fire.

"Evenin', Reverend. Huntin' tigers? Or did you come to shoot my camp up?"

Barking controlled himself, but the effort was noticeable even by the dying firelight.

"These four men, Mr. Bread, are *shikarris*. Since you let those tigers escape it would be madness to go outdoors unprotected. I have engaged these men, and four others, to protect the mission and to shoot those tigers at the first chance."

Joe Bread kicked the fire together. Flame leaped.

"Was that what you came to tell me?" he asked. His eyes narrowed a fraction.

"Partly. I have something I wish to ask. Was it you who drove those tigers into the chapel? Some of my servants say they saw you do it. For the sake of an exciting picture, did you not deliberately risk the lives of upward of a hundred people, including women and children? Be a man now—own up."

"Seems you've given in your verdict, Reverend."

"I have written to your company complaining of your conduct, if that's what you mean."

"Did you give 'em my love?" Bread asked.

"And because it was I who procured your hunting permits, I have written to the authorities to cancel my recommendation."

"That was mighty thoughtful."

"Consequently, you are warned that you are without a hunting permit. Any hunting that you do will be illegal—punishable by fine, imprisonment, or both. I have felt it my duty to inform you of the new situation."

"Duty's hell, ain't it, Reverend? Ridin' in the darkness, tigers an' all, to get my conscience cleaned up. That's tough. But I reckon you're used to savin' folks' souls. Who was it taught you to stew valerian?"

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Have a cigar—" Bread pulled one from his pocket. Barking ignored it. It was promptly offered to the mule, which nibbled it, shaking its head. "Who told you a tiger can't resist valerian if it's stewed by a man who knows how?"

BARKING made as if to mount the mule.

"I didn't come to answer questions, but as one man to another to advise you to leave this district."

"Oh, yeah? What's your hurry? Have a seat on that soap box. Did you hear me?"

Barking sat down. Joe Bread, kicking up another box, sat facing him. He was quite calm.

"Me an' you don't neither of us eat crow easy, Reverend. There's guts in-

side your nasty disposition. You've a heap of pride an' I'm quite willin' to respect it—on terms. Maybe you meant well enough by yourself, an' the mission an' me an' the comp'ny. I don't aim to make you look ridiculous. But I came here to ketch two white tigers. An' I'll ketch 'em. They'll be the comp'ny's tigers soon as I've got 'em crated. If you want a thousand feet or two o' propaganda pictures o' the mission, there'll be no charge for the negative. That teak I took, I'll pay for what it cost, plus ten per cent for good will. But I'm goin' to get them tigers."

"How can you hunt without a permit?" Barking asked acidly.

"I never saw a permit ketch much, Reverend. However, I'd a raft o' passports, visas, permits—signed, sealed *an'* my photo on 'em—'fore I ever heard o' you. So we'll forget that. I'll overlook your—your bad judgment. But talk turkey. Who told you about valerian?"

"I read about it in a book. I made experiments," said Barking. "They might have succeeded. I could have shot those tigers today if some one hadn't damaged my rifle. If you had had gumption, you yourself would have shot them."

"Shot 'em with a camera," Bread answered. "Hot stuff."

Barking blew up.

"That was another thing I came to speak about. Those pictures would create a scandalous impression—of myself, for instance. I won't have it. I demand that you either burn that film or else deliver it to me."

"Oh, yeah?"

"If you refuse, I will go to law about it."

"O.K. with me, Reverend. Law's tricky. I've a copy o' your letter. You invited us to get after them tigers an' film the mission."

"And another thing," said Barking. "There are good grounds for suspecting *you* of having tampered with my rifle. Mrs. Barking says you borrowed it. The dormitory servant says he gave it to you. And a houseboy says that you returned it very soon afterward with the excuse that it was out of order. I had not examined it this morning, I admit. But I know that there was nothing wrong with it last night."

"Hell," Bread answered, "it was me who put valerian on all the dormitory sheets an' on the kids' shirts. It was me who imported them white tigers. It was me who shot McKinley. It was me who sunk the *Maine* an' stole the Prince o' Wales's Sunday overcoat. You'd ought to ha' suspected me o' havin' shot my mother. You don't know how naughty I am."

"So you mock me again?" Barking mounted his mule. "I wish you good night."

"Sweet dreams, Reverend. Watch all them *shikarris*. They might shoot you an' the mule if they should see a tiger."

Barking reined the mule and turned back. He seemed less nervous looking down from that height.

"There was something else," he said.

"I knew it. Reverend, I knew it. Men like you an' me talk plain truth to each other."

"This is what I have to say. I saw you whispering to Mrs. Barking, and I won't have it. I have made her promise she will tell me anything you say to her and repeat to me any message that you send. You are warned. Good night."

Bread's face was as stolid as an Indian's. He made no comment. He stood watching until Barking vanished into outer darkness and Spadger came into the firelight from behind the tent.

"I saw an account in a paper," said Spadger, "of a co-respondent bein' given two years in prison. That's the law of India. You'd better shave those whiskers off an' pull your freight quick."

"Did you ever see a man so scared?" Bread asked him.

"Scared hell. That guy's loaded for duck."

"His sort don't say they're scared,"

Bread answered. "He's the sort that, if he makes a bad break, can't rest till he's blamed it on to some one."

"Sure. He'll make a monkey out of you. He'll—"

"Mind you," Bread interrupted, "he's no liar. When he said he read about it in a book, that's as true as you live. But that's not all of it. Somebody talked to him first. Spadger, me an' you are goin' to get to the bottom o' this."

"If the reverend don't get you first, you drunkard. All you can talk is crossword puzzles."

"Whoever told him about the valerian doublecrossed him."

"How do *you* know?"

"Let's suppose a minute. We're Padma Sang-jee, with a rep for magic, an' the reverend, who's a pious guy, is bound he'll spoil our racket. So he fixes with the local dicks to have us smoked out. Naturally, we feel like a nest o' hornets. An' the law won't help us. On the other hand, we're pretty much like all the other fakirs; we have kidded other folks so long that now we're three parts kidded to believe our own stuff. We're as pious as he is. We're as sure it's pious to get rid o' Christians as he's sure it's O.K. to act mean to a wizard. So we set to work slow an' patient to express the reverend a heap o' grief, collect."

"Slow an' patient—you?" said Spadger.

"We're supposin' we're Padma Sang-jee," Bread answered. He knocked out his pipe and relighted it. "All magicians are alike. They can all spot superstition from a mile off. None of 'em can do a miracle unless it's planted. Most of 'em have superstitious suckers to do the plantin', because suckers kid 'emselves it's on the level. Let's suppose we pick on Govind—he's a sucker, an' he's superstitious. We tell his fortune, an' we fix it so the first part comes true —somethin' easy, such as pickin' up a rupee on the way home.

"Next you know, he thinks we've cured a bellyache with secret spells—for which he pays us back the rupee. This thing leads to that, until he tells us all he knows about himself, an' some of it's plain rotten. Then what? Blackmail. Govind has to do what we say. What we say is plenty."

"Ain't Govind the guy who brought my breakfast?" Spadger asked.

"Yes. He's about as treacherous, I'd estimate, as ten-cent liquor. So it's easy to get him to bite who's fed him. We—bein' Padma Sang-jee—get wise to a pair o' tigers that's maraudin' hereabouts. They happen to be white, which makes 'em good boxoffice; and they're killers, which makes 'em fine for politics. There's just a chance that this Padma Sang-jee is as wise to tigers as some o' these Indians are to serpents. But that's a long chance, so we'll leave it."

"You?" asked Spadger. "Long ones are the kind you bet on."

BREAD kicked up the fire and heaped on fuel. A *mahout* in the near distance cried out shrilly to his elephant. Bread listened. Then he went on:

"Some folks can't figure the length of a chance. This Padma Sang-jee bozo gives out that the two white tigers are his lineup. When they kill, he says he ordered it. Govind carries that tale to the mission hospital and brings back information, so that Padma Sang-jee, who is no slouch at the job o' judgin' 'em, gets a good line on the reverend. He could almost tell his fortune, he's so full o' facts about him. So he orders Govind to tell the reverend that stewed valerian to tigers is the same as free liquor to dry Congressmen. It's likely, anyhow, that them two tigers have been taught the habit."

Joe Bread paused. There was a fuss again among the elephants, but it died down, so he went on talking.

"But the reverend don't know how to cook valerian. There's plenty of it;

he can get it by the carload. But the book he reads it up in don't say nothin' about trappin' tigers. So he cooks some, an' he tries experiments.

"He sets up all night in a tree wi' that pop-gun o' his, an' valerian put nice an' temptin' for the tigers, but they don't come. So he has to ask Govind to get him the recipe. Govind goes, o' course, to Padma Sang-jee— What's eatin' them elephants? Let's go find out."

They strolled together toward the low tent where the three *mahouts* were seated in a row on straw mats. Over beyond the tent three swaying monsters loomed in the darkness. Bread found a sack of oranges and fed one to each brute. There appeared to be nothing wrong. He and Spadger sat down near them on a huge pack saddle. Bread relighted his pipe.

"As I was sayin', Govind goes, o' course, to Padma Sang-jee, who's a professional like me an' you, whereas the reverend is an amateur. An' we know to start with that Padma Sang-jee's raisin' hell not jest on gen'ral principles but with the aim o' takin' down the reverend's number—takin' it down good, you understand, an' jumpin' on it. So it's as easy as eatin' to figure on Padma Sang-jee's nex' move. He has brains enough to get a rep as a magician. He orders Govind to tell the reverend that if he wants valerian stewed proper, there's only one place he can get it. That's from Padma Sang-jee. An' it's magic. But he'll sell. You get that?

"Now let's let on we're the reverend. We're quite a game-cock in our own way. We're a bantam full o' pious energy. An' we've a wife from Ioway who makes us feel inferior by havin' horse sense an' a heap o' humor. She has said her mind about them tigers. Gentle an' kind, she has coaxed him not to kid himself an' run risks he ain't fit for. Not unlikely, they've had words about it.

"He's a peppery little bozo, an' the more she tries to talk him out o' huntin' 'em, the stubborner he sets his jaw. He'll show her he's a better man than she thinks. But he's pious, so he can't act too unreasonable on the surface. He has to agree to send for experienced men an' give 'em a chance. But they fail; an' the more they fail, the more she argues that the job is much too dangerous for him. So he sees his chance to up-stage her by provin' himself a better huntsman than them all. That's obvious."

"Any fool could see that," Spadger answered. "You're not the only wise guy."

"Go on, then. You tell it."

"Geez—you'd bust if you stopped talkin'. Strut your stuff. I'll check you."

"We're the reverend, remember. We've agreed to cable for a bunch o' trouble pullers. That's us. We've a good rep, so he figures he's got to shoot them tigers 'fore we get here, else he'll lose out. Bein' pious, he jes' naturally argues that we'll shoot him a couple o' hundred thousand feet o' Sunday School an' think we're well paid for our trouble. That's his way o' lookin' at it.

"Magic's wicked. But he argues this ain't magic. So he sees no harm in buyin' stuff from Padma Sang-jee. Prob'ly he feels he's actin' generous toward a fallen adversary. Like as not he pays him askin' price an' throws a Bible in. He suspects nothin'. He's a heap too smart to suspect himself o' bein' plain unlucky. So he gives the cash to Govind. An' Govind goes after the stuff. Do you see now how it works out?"

"Anybody could," said Spadger.

"How then?"

"Let's see what a mess you make of it. I'll check you. Go on—"

"O.K. . . . Well, Padma Sang-jee gives Govind the works. He's had plenty o' time to get the goods on Govind. So he threatens him, an' shoots a spell or two, an' flatters him a bit, an' says a lot o' long words—spills the old boloney—

until Govind's judgment, if he ever had any, is shot plumb to hell.

"Maybe, too, he talks him into feelin' sore about havin' been transferred from the hospital. Anyhow, he gets Govind good an' warmed up. Then he gives him a heap o' the stuff, cooked jest right—*an'* instructions. On the way home Govind—this is yesterday mornin', prob'ly—lays a trail o' that valerian as soon as he gets somewhere near the mission. I could smell it in the clearin' where we cut that teak."

"How do you know Govind did it?" Spadger asked.

"Because he has scented himself to beat a Reno jane. Govind is scared o' tigers. He don't want to be tiger bait. He knows what that valerian is meant to do. So he takes care he don't smell of it. He gives a little package o' the stuff to Barkin', who's curious—figures he'll see what it does to the cat. He spreads some on a window ledge where the cat sits frequent—then he puts some on a bed o' flowers an' hides the rest of it. I was watchin' the cat this mornin'. It cut up shameful. That was this A.M. before the tigers 'tended service.

"Point is, it was Saturday forenoon when Govind brought the stuff, an' the mission laundry all gets done on Saturday. It's done by dinner time—that's midday—an' it's left then in tubs o' water to be wrung out after dinner. That's done by a gang o' *dhobies.* What's to stop Govind from droppin' valerian into the tubs while every one's at dinner?"

"Hell, when they come to wring the washin' out they'd smell it," Spadger objected.

"Maybe. Maybe not. If I remember, Curley told me that it takes a few hours for valerian, if it's stewed an' dried, to act up when you wet it. He said that's why some traps fail. But suppose Curley was wrong. They're *dhobies*—lazy as a lot o' dinges in a ditch—an' they don't want to do their work twice over. So they wring it out an' hang it on the line, an' trust the sun to sweeten it.

"The sun dries it in thirty minutes. If it still stinks they figure they'll blame it on somebody else. So they fold an' iron it an' dump it in the baskets. Then it's some one else's job to spread the linen on the beds an' lay the Sunday shirts out ready for the kids. Perhaps they smell it, perhaps not. Anyhow, work's work, an' it's Saturday night, so they say nothin'. An' the kids say nothin', partly because they're scared to, not knowin' yet who'll catch it, an' partly for the mischief o' seein' Barkin' blow up when he gets the stink in Sunday School.

"Now what happens? In the first place, *we* come sooner than expected. That gets the reverend's goat to start with, he bein' hell-bent on gunnin' them tigers himself. As soon as he gets into Sunday School you bet he gets a whiff o' that valerian. Pious ain't the same as pie-eyed, but he ain't too smart, so he doesn't figure yet that there's a trail o' that valerian been laid an' that the whole durned mission is a tiger trap.

"If he'd have thought o' that he'd have acted different. But what he does know durned well is that Mrs. Barkin's going to smell the stuff an' get next. She's no slouch. She'll unearth that Padma Sang-jee business in a brace o' jiffies, an' it's thinkin' o' what she'll say to him, an' what she'll think o' him, an' how she'll kid him that gets him so het up he almost has hysterics.

"But he won't lie. Nobody could make him tell a lie. He knows he'll have to tell her where he got the stuff, an' she'll kid the hell out of him for buyin' bait from a magician. That's bad enough. But then, in come the tigers. If he was plumb idjit—and he is not—he couldn't help know then that Padma Sang-jee'd put one over on him.

"He must ha' seen slap through it, sudden. Hell, if me an' you weren't there, them tigers'd ha' clawed up fifty people. Then what would ha' happened? Padma Sang-jee simply tells a

magistrate that Barkin' bought valerian from him. And he produces Govind. Govind's job's done at the mission, any way you look at it; so Govind naturally swears that Barkin' ordered him to lay a trail o' the stuff. Barkin' denies it, but hell's bells, how else did it happen? It's a mighty rotten tale to have to write home to the trustees. That's the picture in Barkin's mind—he's branded as a reverend who gets himself balled up with native magic. That'll look good in the home papers, won't it?"

"All right. But it didn't work. The tigers did no harm," said Spadger.

Bread, with his eye on the elephants, filled his pipe again.

"Maybe I noticed that, Spadger. But I was showin' you Padma Sang-jee's angle, so we'd get the whole thing straight in our minds. We're goin' to have to deal with Padma Sang-jee an' I want him doped out 'fore he springs one on us. But d'you see how the reverend's mind works? He don't know how that valerian got in the laundry—not yet. He has thoughts o' Govind, naturally. But he's spiteful. It'd suit him better to blame me. If he could run me out of India the blame'd stick to me, an' Govind might decide his bread was buttered that side up. D'you get me? The reverend wouldn't tell Govind to lie. He's pious. But he might send Govind on a long vacation."

"Looks bad," said Spadger. "He's a reverend. People will believe what he says, not what you say."

Joe Bread's jaw jerked forward.

"Maybe he'll be listenin' at the finish. What upsets him most is Mrs. Barkin' an' her sense o' humor. So he aims to fix her. He has seen me wink at her. He accuses her of flirtin' with me."

"He must think she has taste," said Spadger.

"She has plenty of it. She has horse sense, too. She doesn't want to quarrel with the only man she's got; an' he's prob'ly a good little guy when you know him—if you want to know him. So she'll set tight. But I'm countin' on her. An' she's countin' on me."

"Then she's due for a jolt," said Spadger. "Any one who counts on you gets grief—an' plenty of it."

Joe Bread shifted both feet.

"Watch them elephants."

"They want more oranges," said Spadger.

"Hell they do. They're scared o' somethin'."

The *mahouts* got off their mats and went nearer, to stand under the trunks that were testing the night air. They spoke shrilly, but to little purpose. One big brute strained at the rope that held her fast to a tree. The other two were moving to and fro within the narrow compass that their ropes permitted. Joe Bread spoke to Spadger:

"Got your automatic? Is it loaded? Give it to me."

CHAPTER VII

"Tiger, sahib!"

INDIA performed her trick of suddenly becoming dreadful. Darkness, which had been merely dark, solidified into a mystery in which no element seemed calculable. Trees were terrors—impending, enormous, nearer—as if they had moved of their own volition. Sounds were signals of alarm, electrifying nerves until the brain became a magnet that attracted fear.

"Geez," said Joe Bread.

All three elephants screamed as if death had leaped at them and missed. They curled up their trunks out of danger's way and tried to break their heel ropes. They went frantic. Their trunks became flails. They beat the dark air into chaos. The *mahouts* yelled. Joe Bread took the nearest *mahout* by the throat and fired a shot into the air.

"Into your tent," he ordered.

Spadger took his cue from Bread and booted a second one after the first. The third man followed to escape Bread's anger. The elephants ceased flailing—lapsed, little by little, into nervous

alertness; swaying; plucking at iron ankle rings.

Bread spoke calmly.

"I seen that trick more'n once. Them *mahouts* put 'em up to it. How come you chose this place?"

Spadger snapped at the criticism:

"Place is O.K."

"I asked, how come?"

"Met a bozo. Asked him. Led us in here."

"Uh-huh?"

"Now what's eatin' you?"

"Nothin'. Them *mahouts* chin any with the bozo?"

"Some, I reckon."

"Turn the crew out, cook an' all. Stir up the fires an' have 'em heap on fuel. Give 'em each a firebrand."

"Tigers, eh?"

"I dunno. Get a move on. An' send me the flashlight."

Spadger vanished. Joe Bread stood as near the elephants as might be without risking being brained by a flailing trunk. He was motionless; only his sensitive nostrils quivered. Flame leaped from the camp-fires and a dozen whirled brands made rings of fire around frightened carpenters and handymen. A lad came running with the electric torch. Bread snapped it on; elephants, red eyed, restless, loomed up in a pool of silver. Bread switched the light out.

"You stay here," he ordered. Then, after thirty seconds, "You afraid?"

"Yes, sahib."

"What of?"

"I think he is bad man."

"Who is?"

"Some one—I not know him. He make talk to a *mahout* and went away. Then the *mahout* said, 'There is trouble for these sahibs.' That *mahout* put the old ropes on the elephants."

"Yeah—good thing I noticed it. Them old ropes would ha' broken easy. What time did the man come?"

"While the sahibs were at the mission."

"How did you know where we were?"

"He said—"

"Talked to you, too, did he?"

"He was same man who had led us here when Spadger sahib was asking where is proper camping place."

"Oh, yeah? What did he say to you?"

"He said to me, 'You tell those others that your sahibs are in difficulty, much bad magic. If they get away from the mission, there will come worse.' "

"Did you tell 'em?"

"Yes, sahib."

"Why didn't they run away?"

"They said, 'We know our sahibs.' I said also, 'Ours are pukka sahibs who will—' "

Joe Bread snapped the light on. Two bright spots like firelit jewels shone in a shadowy thicket fifty feet away—moved sidewise, then dropped lower.

"Tiger, sahib!"

TO BE CONCLUDED

A Story of the Speedway

POTS

By T. R. ELLIS

SEVEN times in the money in seven tries is a smart record in the auto racin' racket, where the percentage says you're only supposed to finish three races out of five starts. Mike Moosie's Frontenac ain't the fastest speed buggy ever built, but it does stay together and finish races, and that's a lot better than chauffin' one that's the speediest in the world for a lap or two—but winds up sittin' in the pits.

I'm tryin' to get some comfort out of that thought on the last Sunday night in August, nineteen hundred and twenty-some-odd, while I'm parked in the lobby of the only hotel in Chowchilla. I'm tired and hot and grouchy, which I shouldn't be, for I've just finished sendin' Mike his share of the prize money for the seventh time in the eight weeks I've been drivin' for him. Checkin' over the events of the day don't seem to do much toward lightenin' the load of gloom that's settled on the back of my neck.

In the first place, I've seen Jim Allen again. He came down the line of pits before the race, lookin' over the entries, but when he gets to me and the Frontenac he passes us both up cold. It kinda hurts for a short minute, then I shake myself out of the daze and decide if he don't want to speak to me there's no law to

make him. I figure I don't really deserve that from him, though, seein' as how I'd picked him up over in Nevada a couple months before, when he was hungry and in a tight place.

I'd fed him and split what little I had with him only to have him fade out on me a few days later, in Sacramento, leavin' nothin' behind but a short note of thanks. In spite of the fact that he's some years younger than I am, that few days of companionship had meant a lot to a lone wolf like me; and even now, after he's passed me up like a stranger, I find I ain't really sore about it, and I got a kinda sneakin' hope that there's a mistake someplace that'll flatten itself out so we can be buddies again.

Another thing that eliminates any cheer that winnin' second money might give is the fact that durin' the meet just past we've had the first bad break-up of the season. The main event of the day was a fifty-mile race. At thirty miles Speed Holman is leadin'; Billy Wade, in Pop Wengle's car, is right on his tail, and about a quarter of a lap back I'm ridin' easy with a nice lead on third place. As we come poundin' down the back stretch, Billy's car, for no reason at all, suddenly goes into a wing-ding and crashes through the outside rail. A couple laps later, as I pass the hole in the fence, I get a snap glimpse of a white form bein' lifted out of the wreck.

While I'm mullin' over all this Pop Wengle comes into the lobby and sits down beside me. Pop looks so bad you'd think it was him that'd been cracked up.

"Hi, Pop," I say. "How's Billy?"

"Pretty bad, Slim," he chokes. "You were right behind him when it happened. Did you see what caused it?"

"I didn't see a thing, Pop. As I came out of the turn he went into a slide, then spun around and went through sideways." Then I get what's botherin' him, and add, "Don't feel so bad about it. It's not your fault. It's just one of those things that happen. That's speedway, Pop."

Pop shakes his head.

"In a way it is my fault, Slim. That car's killed two men, but up to now I've always blamed it on the driver rather than the car."

I nod and say nothin', and he goes on:

"I've raised Billy ever since he was a little tyke, and I didn't want him to drive, but he insisted. Well, I'm all through now . . . Slim, will you give me a thousand dollars for that automobile as she sets?"

That's a shock. Pop's car is a gift at that price, but I've only got a little better than half that much. While I'm thinkin' it over Pop continues, pleadin'-like:

"It ain't hurt bad, Slim. The motor and frame are as good as they ever were. A hundred dollars will put it in shape again. Go over to the garage and look at it if you want."

"I know you wouldn't lie about it, Pop, but I ain't got that much money."

He looks so disappointed it brings a lump into my throat. After awhile he says:

"You know, Slim, I'd trust you for any amount, but the doctor here thinks I ought to get Billy to Mills Hospital in San Francisco. There's specialists there that might give him a better chance, and I figure I'll need around a thousand dollars."

I'm thinkin' hard while Pop's talkin' and when he's through I blurt out:

"Tell you what I'll do. I'll give you five hundred now and as much more as I can borrow from Mike Moosie when I get back to Frisco. I think maybe I can get nearly all the rest of it."

He brightens considerable, and we go over to the desk where Pop gets pen and paper from the clerk and starts to write out a bill of sale. While we're busy at that job, Speed Holman comes up on the left side of Pop, looks over his shoulder, reads what's been written, then says without any warnin':

"I'll give you a thousand dollars cash for that car, Pop."

We both stiffen and turn toward him. Then Pop relaxes and says, kinda regretful:

"I can't, Holman. Too late. I've just

sold it to Slim."

"You haven't signed the bill of sale yet," snaps Holman, "and this is a thousand dollars cash. It might mean a lot to Billy."

Pop is honest and his word is good, but I can see he's waverin' as he turns to me and says:

"You see how it is, Slim; but I promised you first. What do you say?"

This puts me in a bad spot. I want that car and want it bad. In the first place, it's awful fast, and more than that I'm gettin' tired of drivin' on percentage. Speed Holman gives me a dirty grin of satisfaction and my fists clench in back of me. It looks like there's no way out, though. If I keep Pop to his word, I'm actin' like a heel that's holdin' out on Billy.

Just as I've decided to let it slide, some one in back of me pries open the fingers of my right hand, slips in a roll of somethin' my sense of feel says is money, then closes up my fist again. As I start to turn around my arm is gripped hard in a plea for silence.

I bring up the roll of bills without sayin' a word and start countin'. When I get to five hundred, I stop, hand it to Pop and say:

"Here's some dough I had that don't belong to me. Go ahead and sign that bill of sale. I can fix it up later with the guy whose jack it is."

As I turn around to see who is behind me, I look straight into the brown eyes of Jim Allen. He doesn't speak and neither do I, and I know nobody's seen this bit of byplay; but my heart does a silly flip-flop and I get a warm feelin' around that section.

When I turn back to the business in hand, Speed Holman is burnt up. His mouth is in a hard line and he grates at Pop—

"I'll give you twelve hundred."

Pop shakes his head firmly and says:

"Nope. The car is sold to Slim Hardy."

Holman looks at me and is havin' a hard time with his temper.

"Where did you get a thousand dollars?" he asks in a nasty tone.

"That don't happen to be any of your business," I tell him, gettin' kinda hot, myself.

"I'll give you fifteen hundred for it, just the way it is."

I can't figure why he's so anxious. He owns a Duesenberg that's plenty fast, and he's won six races out of seven times up to the line, so I ask, honestly curious:

"What the devil do you want with it?"

"In your own words," he growls, "I might say that doesn't happen to be any of your damn business."

"No?" I yelp. "Well, park this on your hip and like it: I wouldn't sell *you* that car for fifteen thousand."

He spins on his heel and goes out. And as I turn toward Jim Allen, I find he's gone too. This time, however, I know for sure he'll be back. I start to leave, but the clerk calls:

"Mr. Hardy, here's a note a gentleman left for you."

I tear the envelop open and recognize the writin' I've only seen once before. It says:

> Dear Slim:
>
> As soon as you get this go to the garage and take the carbureter off the car you just bought. Keep it in your room tonight and when you leave carry it in your bag. I'll see you tomorrow and tell you why.
>
> —JIM

When I turn in for the night the carbureter is in my bag under the bed, and my .45 is within easy reach. I don't know why Jim wants that pot, but I know he's goin' to get it.

THE next mornin' after makin' arrangements for havin' the remains of Pop Wengle's car trucked to San Francisco, I stall around until nearly noon waitin' for Jim to show up. About ten o'clock Speed Holman pops into the garage and I get all set for an argument, physical or otherwise. However, he opens up civil enough and says:

"Hello, Hardy. Changed your mind

about sellin' that car yet?"

This guy's gettin' on my nerves. After racin' all Summer with him I'm just beginnin' to decide I don't much care for him.

"Not a chance," I answer. "Besides, you got a car and I need one."

"I suppose you know that car's a killer," he says.

"Yeah?" I ask. "Then what do you want with it? Figurin' on committin' suicide or somethin'? If I thought you would I'd give it to you."

That slows him up a second, but it don't stop him for sour apples.

"I think I know what's wrong with it," he says.

"Uh-huh," I agree. "Maybe the pot gives the front wheels funny notions about climbin' fences."

That shot in the dark registered.

"What do you know about that carbureter?" he demands, excited.

I shove my left hand deep in my pocket and accidentally pull back my coat so the butt of my .45 peeps suggestive-like from under my armpit. Then I tell him:

"I know just enough about it that I'm packin' it in my bag, and if you want it as bad as I think, I'm hopin' you'll try to take it away from me."

That ends the argument and I go ahead with the business of hookin' the Frontenac on behind the Atlas for the long trek back to Mike's place. When I look up a little later, Speed's gone.

I'm about a mile out of town, headed north, when Jim Allen steps out on to the highway and flags me down. Before I get stopped he swings aboard and parks beside me. As he settles himself I say—

"Hello, pard."

"Hello, Slim," he answers.

I'm plenty curious about everything, but we skirmish around the main issue with the usual half embarrassed questions about how we've been, how things are goin' and all that kind of tripe. Then I waste a lot of attention on the straightest and smoothest highway in the State until he cuts loose his range findin' shots.

"Slim," he starts, "did you ever know a race driver with the same last name as mine?"

I have to think awhile, but suddenly I remember.

"Why, sure! Fred Allen, but he wasn't much—" As usual, I stop just too late.

—of a driver," he finishes.

I try to square that break by jugglin' language with my usual clumsiness, but he cuts in:

"You're right, Slim. He never was a speed champion, but I don't believe there's a man in the country who knew more about motors. Added to that, he was one swell brother."

That seems to spot his bracket and for the next fifty miles he lays down a steady barrage of words. I gather from his story that he and his brother Fred have been orphans ever since Jim can remember. Fred bein' somewhat older, he has taken it on himself to be father, mother and a half dozen aunts and uncles to the kid. They'd lived in Los Angeles until Jim finished high school, about seven years before, then he was shipped off to Kansas City to an automotive engineerin' school, and Fred opened up a garage outside of Cleveland. When Jim graduated he was given a job with Norman Motors in Detroit.

Meanwhile Fred had taken in another race driver as a partner in the garage and had been spendin' most of his time workin' on a new high speed carbureter. He writes to Jim about it and even sends him a couple pictures and a drawin' of it. It looks good to Jim and Fred goes back to the speedway to raise enough money to get a good lawyer to push it through the patent office. Before he gets anywhere he's killed at Syracuse. Jim rushes there, and this additional shock, added to the strain of doin' seven years' schoolwork in six, and workin' like the devil to make good on his new job, knocks him through the rail.

His nerves go boppo and he spends six weeks in the same hospital his brother died in. When he gets back to the little town outside of Cleveland he finds the garage bein' run by a stranger who

bought it at a sheriff's sale, Fred havin' plastered it with mortgages durin' the year previous.

The late partner and Fred's new high speed pots—carbureters—have apparently been sunk without a trace, so he starts out on a still hunt to locate both, if possible. The pots are easy enough to identify, but Fred has overlooked mentionin' the partner's name in his letters, and Jim has never seen him.

That's the gist of the thing, and Jim winds up his yarn:

"And I pulled out on you that night in Sacramento because you'd been mighty good to me, and I didn't want to give myself away. As a matter of fact, for all I knew you might have been the guy I was lookin' for yourself, though I'd have bet my shirt you couldn't have pulled a raw job like that. Since then I have been knockin' around racetracks and lookin' at the carbureter side of every car I can get close enough to. One of the carbureters is now in your bag."

"One of them?" I asked. "How many did he make."

"A set of four for an eight-cylinder race car, and one for a four. I've located all of them."

"Where's the rest of them?" I asked, though I'm pretty sure what the answer'll be.

"Bolted on Speed Holman's Duesenberg," he replies.

"And how the devil did he get 'em?'

Jim shakes his head as he answers:

"I don't know, Slim, any more than I know how Pop Wengle got the one we have now. I can't go and ask him about them, because he may get the wind up. It's possible that to him they may be just another set of carbureters."

"Don't kid yourself, boy. I took a wild shot this mornin' and mentioned the one I have in the bag. You should have seen him get all wound up. He was mighty anxious to get Pop Wengle's car, and I betcha nine dollars to a fried egg he's it."

"Whether he is or not," he says wearily, "I'm tired of battlin' this thing alone. You're in on this thing with me now, and I wish you joy with it."

With that he crawls into the back end of the car and curls up to sleep; leavin' me with a jumble of race cars, tracks and high speed pots buzzin' through the back of the old bean.

The next afternoon we drag into San Francisco, and that evenin' I get Mike alone in the office and recite the story of Jim Allen and the pots. Mike's got a rep for keepin' things under his hat, and listens patiently. He don't show any sign of life until I tell him Pop Wengle's car will be in town the next day. Then he says:

"You made a good buy, Slim. That's a fast car—nobody's ever kept it on the track long enough to find out how fast. Harry Miller made that overhead valve action, Eddie Winfield ground the cams and I think I know what's wrong with the front end."

"What?" I ask.

"I'll tell you when I see it. If your new buddy learned anything in that school and if I've learned anything on tracks, we may get together and find the answer to keepin' that car on the course. If we do, there's no reason why it can't be made to earn plenty dough. Four barrels can be wound up just as tight as eight on a dirt track, and they're lots easier to bend when the turn comes slidin' up to you."

That's one of the longest speeches on record for Mike, and I reply:

"I'll give you all that. But what am I goin' to do about gettin' that set of pots away from Speed Holman?"

Which brings the same help I get from Jim Allen—

"That's *your* problem."

A couple days later I wander into the back shop to find Mike and Jim up to their necks in the Wengle Special. The body's off and they both got a fistful of machinists' scales, plumb lines and straight edges. The floor is littered with tools; their conversation is littered with "wheel camber," "center of gravity," "tie-rod action" and a lot more Greek. All I get

for a couple meek suggestions is the pleasure of bein' ignored. Finally I get fed up on it and yelp:

"What is it with you guys? Am I an orphan around this joint?"

"Don't call this dump a joint," growls Mike, "and don't bother the tired help. Go on up in the office and wait on the customer, if he comes in today. Meanwhile think over your problem."

THE entrance to the town of San Colomo is a wide spot in the road not far south of San Francisco. If it wasn't for the high board fence of the Hanadan race course bein' just next door, a lot of people would blast on down the highway without ever seein' it, and nobody has decided yet whether the town made the track or the track made the town. Before the days when the State legislature connects up with a sudden rush of virtue, Hanadan was home plate to some of the fastest four-footed thoroughbreds on the Pacific Coast; and I betcha a bunch of one-time horsemen turned over in their graves when it was announced that a one-hundred-mile automobile race would be held there on the fifteenth day of September, in the year I been tellin' you about.

The afternoon before the race me and Jim and Mike are packed in the front seat of the Atlas, poundin' down the road from San Francisco. The back end is loaded up with spare wheels and tools, and danglin' on a tow-bar astern is the Wengle Special. She's carryin' the bright yellow body off the Frontenac and Mike has decorated both sides of the tail with a big No. 9. As I look back at her, trailin' behind, I tell Mike—

"She's a sweet lookin' job now."

"Yeah," he says, dry-like. "If you win tomorrow I'll let you pay me the next day. If you don't—"

"That'll be *your* problem," I chirp, with a lot of satisfaction.

Near one o'clock we pull in at the front gate of the course and are greeted by a roar of exhausts from the track that says we're not the first ones on hand for a tryout. While we're waitin' for a chance to get across to the pit side, we see the place is all cluttered up with race cars. I spot Andrews and Kern, the "Duesy twins," so-called because they both drive black cars of that make. Farther down the line is Joe Williams and his red Miller Special, then Charlie Bobby with his S-R Fronty. There's two D-O Frontys I've seen at Ascot, and a half dozen others that are new to me but look plenty fast. I point 'em out to Mike and groan—

"Where the devil did all the competition come from?"

"Huh," he snorts. "Didja expect to clip two thousand bucks first money without havin' an argument?"

We find an empty pit near the north end of the line and while we're unhookin' the tow-bar we hold a confab wherein it's agreed that Jim is to stay pretty much in the background. If it's necessary to introduce him at all, he's to be Jim anything but Allen. As I'm pullin' on my helmet Mike nods across the track and says:

"Oh, Slim. Here comes your load o' grief."

Crossin' the course at the south end of the grandstand is Speed Holman, towin' his blue Duesenberg. As I pull my glasses down over my eyes and slide under the wheel, Jim drops a hand on my shoulder. He looks kinda white and nervous as he says:

"Be careful out there, Slim. We've got this car licked on paper, but—"

"Sure, son," I tell him, with a pat on the back. "Don't worry. I'll take her easy till I see how she's goin' to behave."

As Mike spins the crank I flip the switch and the motor comes to life with a roar that brings a startled look from drivers and mechanics up and down the line. Easin' around the course for a few laps, gradually pickin' up speed, I can see Mike standin' at the edge of the track with a watch in his hand, waitin' for me to signal him to time a fast lap. Startin' into the back stretch on the fifth lap I kick the throttle; and man! You should

have seen the reaction! I never saw a turn come toward me so fast in my life. As I bend her into the curve the wheels bite without slidin' an inch. Comin' out into the front straightaway, I hold up my hand and as I streak past the pit I see Mike's fist jerk as he snaps the watch. Crossin' the white startin' line about a hundred feet farther on, I get a quick glimpse of Speed Holman doin' the same thing, so I fool him. In the backstretch I cut the switch, coast around to our pit and stop. Mike comes runnin' up all scared.

"What happened?" he shouts.

"Oh, nothin'," I answer, bored-like.

"Why didn't you keep goin'? I snapped the watch on you that time."

"Uh-huh," I tell him. "So did my little playmate down at the startin' line, and I figure what he don't know won't make him lose any sleep."

Holman's still standin' there lookin' foolish, and Mike and Jim grin at each other. Then Jim says, admirin'—

"You don't miss many bets, do you, Slim?"

"Can't afford to in this racket," I tell him shortly. "Let's go to town."

On the way in Mike asks—

"How does that front end act?"

"Sweetest handlin' job I ever sat in."

"How about speed?" Jim inquires.

"Plenty of it," I assure him. "The turns come up so fast it's hard to believe it's a mile around."

Mike drops me and Jim off at the hotel to arrange for rooms while he looks after garage space. As we're signin' the register the clerk wants to know if we belong to the racin' gang, and on bein' told we do, he informs us that the management is givin' a banquet for the crew and we're invited. That gives me the germ of an idea and, while we're waitin' for Mike, I do some heavy thinkin'. Pretty soon Jim smiles and asks—

"Why so serious, Slim?"

"Just wonderin' how much of a gambler you are, son."

"Much as the average, I guess. Why?"

"I was just tryin' to dope out a method for corralin' those pots, and—"

"Listen," he says. "Go ahead and play your hand. If we win, we split; if we lose we go broke, and I guess we've both been that way before."

THE banquet starts at eight o'clock and me and Mike are there early. We manage to get seats next to each other, and directly across the table from Speed Holman. To avoid embarrassin' questions, Jim elects to stay in the rooms.

The food is good and things go along smooth enough until around nine, then the Three-A representative makes his usual speech about sportsmanship—that bein' the polite way of sayin' Contest Board rules will be enforced with an iron fist—after which he leaves. As soon as he's out of the door the pressure's released and the talk gets down to racin' channels. When things get loosened up I yelp—

"Could any of you throttle pushers use a drink?"

A yell, mostly from the mechanics, assures me they could, so I drag out three pint bottles of liquor. Startin' one toward each end of the table, I set the third one in front of me and announce:

"Listen, you *hombres*, this one here is private supply. I've been at these parties before. If the rest of you need any more you'll have to promote it."

I've neglected to tell Mike that my bottle holds a pint of the best tea outside of China, and as I pour myself half a water glass of the stuff then kick it off at one gulp, he growls under his breath:

"You damn fool, you losin' your mind? Ain't nobody told you there's a race in this town tomorrow."

Across the table Speed Holman has both ears tuned in on our wave length, so I answer loud enough for him to hear:

"Say, fella, I don't need no nurse. It'll be a good party directly. Stick around."

"Oh, I'll be here," Mike says, kinda bitter. "I'll have to put you to bed, I suppose—but sombody ought to knock your block off."

Holman smiles the same grin of satisfaction I saw that night in Chowchilla as I pour myself a bigger drink than the last one. Mike slumps in his seat and, when I offer him a drink, he won't even answer me. Charlie Bobby is sittin' next to Holman and beyond him is Ed Kern. In a few minutes the talk drifts around to speed, and they all get to arguin' about the time that will be made the next day. This gives me an openin'. My bottle is about two-thirds gone now, and I get to my feet kinda shaky, weave over the table a bit and shout:

"Lishen, you turtles. Talkin' 'bout schpeed, I wancha dring a toas' to th' four-barrel baby tha's gonna bring in you eight-lung wagons on a tow-bar. Th' Wengle Speshul."

That gets a weak laugh from one or two, but most of 'em are silent because that's sockin' 'em right where they live. I shake my head a bit as if tryin' to clear the fog. Then, lookin' straight at Speed Holman, I go on:

"P'tic'larly you eggs drivin' Dooz'n-bergs. If any o' ya think y'r fast and wanna bet on it, step up 'n' write y'r own ticket."

Everything's quiet for a second, then Holman's voice cuts through.

"I suppose you're talkin' to me, Hardy?"

"Anybody. Race ya f'r money, marbles 'r chalk."

"How much do you want to bet that you win tomorrow?" he asks, in a hard voice.

"Din' shay I'm gonna win," I hedge carefully, "an' I ain' got much money, but—"

"Thought so," he snorts. "You're four-flushin'."

"Lemme finish," I tell him. "I betcha my race car 'gainst yourn I come under th' flag in fronta *you*!"

That crack snaps 'em all up straight in their seats. Holman's eyes narrow and he leans back in his chair, thinkin' fast. He's beaten every one here at some time or other; and while he's not popular, it's admitted he has a fast car and knows how to drive it. It looks like he's tryin to cinch me up in my own net as he says:

"Blah! I've heard that crack ever since I've been around race-tracks. Somebody's always goin' to bet a race car and I've never seen it done yet."

"Theresh a bet f'r ya," I insist, like a blind drunk walkin' off a cliff. "That is, 'f ya got any gutsch an' wanna bet."

"Put it on paper," he snaps, and his jaws come together with a click.

Then the tension's busted wide open. Ed Kern leaps to his feet and says, plenty loud:

"You can't do that, Holman. Can't you see he's drunk?"

Mike stands up beside me and pleads in my ear:

"Don't be any more of a fool than you have to, Slim. Let's go up to the room."

I push him back in his chair and wave my arms for silence to carry on my argument with Holman. The upshot of the whole thing is that each of us writes a bill of sale for our cars and gives it to Mike with the understandin' that the one who leads the other in is to get both of them. There's plenty of protest from the gang, who are pretty sore at Holman and think I'm the prize drunken fool of the year, but one of the first things you learn around speedways is mindin' your own business. When everything's completed I lean on Mike and say—

"Lesh go home, Mike."

"Hell, yes," he answers wearily, "before you sell some one the State highway system."

I wobble pretty bad on the way out, leanin' kinda heavy on Mike, and though I have a tough time keepin' my face straight, I carry on the act all the way to the room. When we get there Jim is still up readin' and as we come in the door Mike says—

"Hey, kid, help me put this sap to bed."

"Put who to bed, you sawed-off shrimp?" I demand, straightenin' up. "Let me see those bills of sale."

Mike drops into the closest chair and his mouth flops open.

"Wh-what?" he gasps. "Why, you

ain't drunk!"

"My mother didn't raise no foolish kids," I tell him, "but I ought to be in the movies instead of wastin' my time around racetracks with guys like you."

Between chuckles Mike tells the events of the evenin' to Jim. As he finishes Jim is holdin' his middle and rollin' on the bed. Then I yank 'em both out of it.

"Into bed, you fellas. We're goin' to the track at six o'clock in the mornin'."

"No bed for me," says Mike. "Gimme your gun, Slim. I'll do my sleepin' in the Atlas; just in case some egg thinks the Wengle Special can run without a carbureter."

OUR six o'clock tryout the next mornin' is all we're hopin' for and more. Me an' the Wengle unwind three laps, then lay down the fourth in forty and a fifth seconds. As I roll into the pit Mike's ugly mug is smeared with a big grin. He shows me the watch and says—

"They won't clip 'em off much faster than that."

"Not in competition, anyway," I agree. "And just in case they do, there's still a half-inch of throttle that ain't been used yet."

I crawl out of the car and the three of us squat on the runnin' board of the Atlas while I unload the dope for the afternoon. After the plan of action is all straightened out, we beat it back to town for some sleep . . .

By noon Old Sol has developed one of those hot, blisterin' days that California never has, but it's perfect carburetion weather, so we don't kick. On the way back to the track the highway is jammed, and inside the fence is a crowd that ought to make any promoter laugh right out in meetin', though I never saw one that could stop cryin' about the prize money long enough to do it. The reserved seat windows are closed with a "sold out" sign, and at both ends of the grandstand a steady line of cash customers is crossin' the course for standin' room in the infield. Even the runway from the stands to what used to be the jockey club has been lined with chairs and sold as box seats.

When we get across the track one of the assistant starters shunts us in at pit No. 9 and we unload the Atlas and take it off the course. In the pits north of us are the D-O Frontys from Ascot, and the program says they will be driven by Ayres and Donaldson. Just south of us is Andrews with one of the black Duesys; next to him is Williams and the Miller, and farther down the line in pit 6 is Holman and the blue Duesenberg.

As I walk back and forth lookin' 'em over, he gives me a hard look, which is returned, postage paid, but neither of us speak. There's about sixteen entries, if all of 'em qualify, but outside of the three Duesenbergs, the Miller Special and the D-O's and Bobby's S-R Fronty I don't look for much competition. This racin' racket is funny, though. You never know who's fast until they go blastin' by to take the lead away from you, so I don't underrate any of 'em.

When I get back to our pit the timers are layin' the wire across the track, and Ed Kern in the black Duesy No. 1 is bein' shoved up to the line to qualify.

Mike, runnin' accordin' to schedule, pulls up the bonnet of the Wengle Special and starts scatterin' tools and cuss words without fear or favor. Jim gets a pencil and paper and goes to the startin' line to take down the qualifyin' time and who makes it, while I stand around tryin' to look worried.

Ed Kern in the Duesy roars by a couple times and on the third lap sticks up his hand. The clock wire is set, the starter flips his flag, the wire is tripped and he's through the turn and down the back stretch. Up the long front straightaway he comes, motor singin' like a high powered dynamo, under the flag and into the south turn again. Most of the drivers are gathered in a knot near the startin' line. This is the first automobile race held on this track and they're plenty anxious to get the dope on that first qualifyin' lap. The announcer swings his megaphone and bellows the time.

Forty and four-fifths seconds. Not bad time for a mile dirt with practically no bank on the turns.

Charlie Bobby and the S-R job go to the line and I drop interest in the qualifyin' and concentrate on the next step in our schedule. In a few minutes the assistant starter comes chuggin' down the line like a tugboat chasin' a destroyer. As he comes abreast of our pit I nail him and ask—

"Hey, buddy, where you got us on that qualifyin' list?"

He looks at the number on the Wengle, then at his paper.

"Sixth," he barks, in his best official tone.

"No can do," I tell him. "Got a repair to make. May not be able to run at all. Put me last on your list, will you?'

As he looks at the car Mike smokes up the air with some more profanity and hurls a wrench up against the pit fence. The important official hesitates a minute, then says:

"All right, but if you're not ready then, you don't run. This race starts on time."

He steams on down the line and Mike straightens up with a grin.

"So far, O.K," he says. "All you have to do now is run the wheels off a few Millers and Duesys."

"Yeah, that's all!"

A wild roar from the stands brings us up standing. Speed Holman's blue Duesenberg is coastin' into the pit and the megaphone has just called his time at forty and one-fifth. Mike catches a quick breath.

"Whew! Looks like you're gonna have to use that other half-inch of throttle."

Before I can answer, Jim comes bustin' up, drags me off to one side and says earnestly—

"Listen to me a minute, Slim, and think fast."

He's so serious he's lost his good English and is 'talkin' the racetrack jargon the rest of us garble.

"Can't we call this bet off?" he says. "Holman's worried and I think he would if he got a chance. If anything happened to you out there I'd—well, I don't know what I'd do. I'm happier now than I've been since Fred—since I left Detroit, and I'd just as soon go on knockin' around tracks with you. The hell with the pots. Let 'im keep 'em."

I put an arm around his shoulder and have to swallow hard a couple times before I can say, with a lot more confidence than I feel:

"Don't worry, boy, everything's gonna be O.K. We got this race in the bag. I know he's usin' the same pots we are, but those eight barreled babies are long and hard to handle in the turns. Wait till I go out and set a track record for 'em and you'll feel better."

The assistant starter's headed in our direction, so I pull on my helmet and glasses and crawl behind the wheel. Mike spins the crank and I ease up to the line. That last talk with Jim has got me keyed up to the last revolution and the motor seems to feel it, too.

Steve Langley, handlin' the flags, is a Three-A starter and one of the best that ever flipped a buntin'. As I stop for instructions he asks—

"How many, Slim?"

"I'll take it on the third, I think."

"Go ahead. Hold up your hand when you're ready. Good luck."

The motor lets out a whoop as the clutch takes and we're on the way. Nearly everybody on the pit side of the track is gathered at the line again, waitin' to see how much chance I have to collect that bet.

THE first round we wind up gradual, and as we go down the back stretch on the second I kick the throttle and she takes it with a jump. I stick up my hand comin' out of the north turn on the third. The stands and the flag go by in a blur and as we round the south curve enterin' the back stretch I nail the throttle to the floor board. Goin' in the north turn I flip the wheel a little. She broadsides through, straightens out perfect and we're down the front stretch and past the flag

before I can blink twice. Enterin' the south turn again, I cinch up the binders and the wheels let out a *whee-e-e* of protest. Tourin' around slow to the front again, I see the knot of drivers and mechanics has moved from the line down to our pit. Before I can get stopped someone is runnin' alongside yellin':

"Thirty-nine-three! Thirty-nine-three!"

The gang pounds me on the back for a few minutes, then gradually drifts back to their pits. Holman is left.

"Don't get too cocky, Hardy," he rasps. "There's a lot of difference between a qualifyin' lap and a hundred miles of competition."

I know that as well as he does, but I wave my hand airy-like.

"Stick around, small boy, and learn somethin' about drivin' dirt tracks. Maybe I can teach you how to get pole position when you qualify."

He turns his back in disgust and pulls out. Then Eddie Kern comes up, squintin' at me real steady for a minute.

"What you lookin' at, you big ape?" I demand, smilin'.

"Nothin'," he says, casual. Turnin' to leave, he tosses back over his shoulder, "I was just wonderin' how drunk you were last night."

Then he beats it, laughin' as Mike throws an empty oil can at his feet.

By now the starter is callin' 'em into line-up position. I'm snatchin' the last few drags off a cigaret while I look at Jim's list of the qualifyin' time. Mike's cleanin' off a big slate and, as I crawl back into the car, he says:

"Same signals, old Dynamite. Position above the line, laps below. Both hands down for hold it or ease up, and both hands up for step on it. Right?"

"Right," I answer.

As they push me up to the line Jim don't say a word, but his eyes are shinin' and I get a feelin' that everything's goin' to be all right. I got pole position on the front line and in a minute the starter tells me to hold 'em down durin' the parade lap until I get the flag. I nod as he goes on down the line dealin' out his orders. While we're waitin', I look over the lineup.

On my right is Holman in the blue Duesy, No. 6; next is Donaldson in the D-O Fronty, No. 10; then Andrews, with the black Duesy, No. 8. Just in back of me is Williams in the red Miller, No. 7; then Charlie Bobby and the S-R job carryin' No. 12; next to him is the other black Duesy, No. 1; and the other D-O, No. 11. The rest of them are so far back I can't see 'em and, anyway, their qualifyin' time has been so much slower I don't have to worry much about 'em.

Steve comes back with the flag under his arm and gives the "wind 'em up" signal. Mike kicks her over and the motor goes to work again. As they start back to the pit I grab Jim by the arm and yell:

"So long, kid. I'll be seein' you in a little over an hour."

He nods and smiles as Steve gives us the highball.

We slip into gear and start rollin', makin' so much noise the ground shakes. Goin' down the back stretch, I can see the four in front are holdin' their position, so I take a look at the gages, hit the pressure pump a couple licks, get a grip on the wheel and settle down to the long grind. As we sweep around the north turn the starter steps out to the edge of the track holdin' the flag behind him. When we're about a hundred feet from the line he brings it up over his head, then down with a snap, and the leash is off.

The Wengle leaps toward the south turn as I jam the throttle to the boards. She goes through like she's geared to the track, then fairly flies down the back straightaway. Lap after lap I hold her there lookin' for somebody's wheels to pull up alongside, so I'll know whether to increase the pace or not, but I keep the lead without argument. Seems like nobody wants it. After awhile Mike comes out on the track and holds the slate above his head. As I shoot by I read—

1—10. First place and ten laps gone.

Goin' into the south turn on the eleventh, I snatch a quick look over my shoulder. The nose of Holman's Duesenberg is within five feet of my tail. A few laps later I look again and he's still there, but makin' no effort to get any closer. Round after round goes by the board. I'm beginnin' to think Mike's forgot me, when he sticks up the slate again. It tells me I'm still first and that we've turned thirty-five laps. The next time by he holds out his hands, palm down, across the track.

I wonder what the devil he wants me to slow up for, but the next time by he does it again. I back off the throttle a fraction. Holman pulls up alongside, looks at me, then drops back again. As we flash down the front again Mike still has his hands spread like a baseball umpire callin' a man safe, and is shakin' his head, insistent. Then I get the idea.

Holman's ridin' in my draft, takin' advantage of the suction of the Wengle. That way he can travel just as fast without as much strain on his motor. When I tried to give him the lead he wouldn't take it. All right, we'll try a fast one on him.

Goin' down the back straightaway I reach out and cut my switch off for a split-second, then back on again. The car slows down quick and Holman has to pull wide to keep from smackin' his radiator shell into my tail. Just as he's started to swing by, my exhaust goes *bang! baloop! baloop!* and another *bang!* as I cut the switch back in. It's an old trick, but it has the effect I hope for. He takes the bit in his teeth and rips into the lead, while I fall into the position he has just held. Passin' the pit this time, Mike gives me an O. K. signal and I know he's got what he wanted.

Now we're startin' to catch up with some of the tail-enders. As we come out of one turn we can see 'em goin' into the next, and in a little while we start lappin' 'em. With a quick count at the cars sittin' in the pits I estimate there's about seven left in the race. Another snap look in back shows the red Miller and one of the black Duesys, but not knowin' what cars are out there's no use tryin' to guess who's behind 'em.

Turn after turn comes up to meet us and stretch after stretch rolls under the wheels. This guy Holman is settin' a murderous pace and I'm beginnin' to get tired. A signal from the pit snaps me up after we've been goin' for what seems like hours. The next lap by Jim is holdin' up the slate with its message of second place and seventy laps gone, while Mike is wavin' a "hurry up" signal over his head. O. K, Mike, we'll see what we can do.

I SLOWLY push the throttle down to the boards again, and Holman gives me a look of amazement as I pull up beside him. Then he hunches over his wheel a little more, preparin' to do battle—and when I say battle I don't mean ping-pong. The grandstand blurs by, time and again, as we turn laps hub and hub. The spectators linin' the infield fence step back like one man as we broadside out of the turns at 'em. Speed is chauffin' the blue Duesy like a master, but the shorter wheelbase of the Wengle is countin' in the turns now, its lighter weight is givin' just a little more pickup on the stretches, and an inch at a time we're pullin' away. On what the slate tells me is the ninetieth lap we finally get the lead back and pull down to the pole position again.

As I blast down the front stretch now, I can see Mike and Jim hangin' on to each other doin' a dance.

"Dance, damn it," I groan to myself, "and let me do the work!"

This pace is sure tellin' now. I got a ton o' lead restin' on the nape of my neck. My elbows ache, the feelin's gone out of my fingers, my tongue is stickin' to the roof of my mouth and my hips are raw from bein' pounded in the seat. I'm damn glad now they've fixed the Wengle so she'll go where she's pointed without me havin' to fight her.

I live a century in the next few minutes. I've lost all sensation of speed now and

we seem to be crawlin' around. Holman makes a super-effort and pushes his front wheels about even with my seat. I tear my right hand away from the wheel to give the pressure pump a few more licks. The motor snarls and I pull away until his front wheels are just even with my back ones. For the first time since the start of the race I'm gettin' nervous. The Wengle's givin' all she's got now, and if I can't keep him there it's just a bad day.

A few more rounds and the starter steps out to give us both the green with one wave of his flag. We're enterin' the last lap and Holman is still poundin' my tail, but can't gain an inch. A few seconds more—and the checker flag is snapped. It's all over and I'm coastin' into the pit a winner!

The next ten minutes are kinda hazy. I can't remember much but a blur o' faces and people shakin' my blistered hands. Mike and Jim come plowin' through the mob and help me out of the car.

The track and the grandstand are still spinnin' by, and I sit on the ground with my back to the pit fence until they gradually slow down and stop, as my nerves and eyes get back to normal. The crowd melts away and one at a time the other drivers hook up their tow-bars and leave. I get up and stretch, lookin' across the infield, but turn around as I hear Holman's voice behind me. Mike and Jim come over and lean up against the fence on either side of me, as he says:

"Well, Hardy, you're the best. You own the Duesenberg, but—but—" he slows up, then blurts in a rush—"I can't give you the carbureters."

"The hell you shout! Why, you—"

He holds up his hand to stop me.

"Hold everything, before you say something you're liable to regret. If you'll listen and give me the benefit of a doubt, I don't think you'll take 'em."

His face is haggard through the oil and grime. He drove a wonderful race and drove it square, so I kinda relent.

"All right, mister, we're listenin'."

"Those carbureters don't belong to me."

He waits a second to let that soak in, then goes on:

"They were made by another race driver; a buddy of mine and one of the decentest guys that ever lived. Before he could do anything with them he was killed in a race. I took 'em and slipped out of town to keep 'em from bein' taken for debt. I sold one to Pop Wengle because I was hungry and up against it, and for some reason he would never sell it back to me. This race driver had a young brother and for the last six months I've spent a lot of money tryin' to locate him. Some day that kid'll show up and demand those pots and, Hardy—"the strain is tellin' now and his voice breaks —"what, in God's name, will I tell him?"

As he finishes I find I'm not near as hopped up about winnin' this race as I was before he started. Then I hear Jim's voice sayin', gentle-like:

"You won't have to tell him anything, Speed. I'm Fred Allen's brother and I might have known he wouldn't have made a mistake in pickin' a partner. Shake hands, guy."

As Holman offers his hand, kinda bewildered, Jim continues:

"Slim and me are partners now, and I'm sure he'll back me up in sayin' we'd like to have you keep your Duesenberg."

Then all hands turn to me expectant-like. I have to nod my O. K. because, for the first time in my life, I'm outa words.

The TROPICAL TRAMP

By CLIFF MOSIER

SO, SON, you've come to our tropics?
Heard all that you had to do
Was sit in the shade of a coconut glade
While dollars roll in to you?"

I looked sharply at the tottering stranger who had swung about at my table and put his knuckles on the far edge as a support. His whites were clean but crumpled, as if put on without being ironed. When he swept off his battered sun helmet with an uncertain hand, I saw the mahogany tan of his wrinkled, leathery face reaching on up into his close clipped gray hair. His eyes, with the madness of half-intoxication, peered quizzically at me as if he expected an answer to his doggerel.

"No, I'm not looking for a snap—" I laughed, deciding to humor him—"but the Bureau of Commerce gave me figures that justify me in expecting to do better than back in the States."

"Got your dope from the Bureau, eh?
You got your statistics straight?
Just hear what it did to another kid
Before you find out too late."

The rhyming gargoyle interested me. With a dull hour yet to be spent in Kingston after finishing my errands ashore, I was minded to pass it with this interrupter of my day-dreaming on the seaside patio of the Myrtlebank Hotel.

"Hey, boy!" I signaled a grinning Jamaican. "Two planters' punches, quick!"

The grateful look of my stranger soothed an ego that others had irritated in criticizing my decision to go below the Line to seek my fortune.

"Sit down," I invited. He slumped slackly into a chair. "Tell me what's wrong with the tropics. Biehn is the name, and Uncle Sam is giving his nephew a start at a consulate in Chile."

He nodded—a gesture of politeness only, for his eyes had taken on the dreamy glaze of one busy with his own thoughts. He did not offer his name or his hand at my attempt at introduction. His twisted mouth moved:

"A dream I had when just a lad
Was to work for our Uncle Sam
In a far-off clime, and in quick time
I was down on the Gatun Dam.

"But I quit the Ditch with the devil's itch
To wander and strike for quick wealth.
It's a lure that holds every vagrant's soul.
I had youth and courage and health!"

The boy set down the concoctions of Jamaican rum, lime and whatnot, and my guest's fingers curled about one, but he made no move to drink . . .

"But honor ebbs low in the tropics' glow,
In heat a foretaste of hell,
And I fell quick prey to a crooked lay
That invited in Cozumel.

"I made short weight on the Rio Plate,
Running a freighter there,
And cracked a crib on a rich estate
Without ever turning a hair."

He sipped his drink reflectively, then a fierce gleam came in brown flecked eyes that narrowed as he turned them on me, and he leaned farther forward.

"A high-grader plot I've ne'er forgot—
In a Mexican mining camp—
For a ghost still walks of the man I stalked
And left a corpse in the damp!

"But the sin that will double bar my soul
As it flaps at Satan's doors
Was peddling booze to the Santa Cruz,
And Winchester forty-fours.

"Made unafraid by my fiendish aid,
The drink crazed brutes swarmed down
And, frenzied, made a hell scorched glade
Of a flourishing Border town."

Tossing off his drink, he made an ever so slight suggestive rap with the glass on setting it down. I signaled to the hovering waiter.

"How did you happen to get into that?" I prodded, as he seemed inclined to drowse.

He roused himself with a jerk and replied:

"I was Colonel Hicks in that hellish mix,
At the head of the grand revolt."

He put a world of sarcasm into the adjective, and went on sadly:

"But my only friend from start to end
Was a punishing Army Colt.

"President then I might have been,
A prominent man of means,
But a gunboat came and blocked my game
With a hundred and ten Marines."

"Tough!" I sympathized. "But, friend, I've no intention of trying any filibustering. That Gibrara, Cuba, job would have cured me of the notion if I'd ever had it."

"Bad luck on land? I tried a hand
At a barratry job or so, [he went on, ignoring me]
Till I came to grief on a sudden reef
Before I was ready to go.

"I swam ashore on a broken oar
In treacherous, reeking dark
While the other few of my good ship's crew
Were converted into shark.

"From a limestone cliff, I flagged a skiff
With a salt soaked pair of jeans
And worked my way, for I couldn't pay,
On a freighter to New Orleans."

That should have taught the fellow a lesson, I thought. He should have been ready to reform after such a streak of luck. When another gulp of the fresh drink had gone down, he wagged his head commiseratingly and droned on:

"For a year or two, I tried to do
As they say in the Golden Rule.
In a gentler land, I made a stand—
But what hope's there for a fool?

"With honest gains from labor's pains
I might have been content
But the tropics' call came through it all—
I heard it, and back I went!

"With a price on my head, I was nearly dead,
Down low with the yellowjack
On a fiery, hot, flea bitten cot—"

His voice broke into a half-sob and I turned to my own glass to avoid seeing a man weep. I'd seen them before—those crying jags. But he straightened and went on:

"*She* found me—and brought me back."

Looking at me with a peculiar intensity, he reached a hand over the table and plucked at my sleeve to catch my eye.

"Did you ever sit in a deep, dark pit
And gaze at a star above?
That's how I saw her with heart astir,
And knew the redemption of love.

"She guided me back on a virtuous track,
Where I might have been yet today,
When Fate stepped in with a ghastly grin
And she was taken away.

"A knife sped free—it was meant for me—
But all I heard was a scream
As she took the blow, for she loved me so
She'd thrown herself between.

"Then the scoundrel fled, for she was dead,
And I swore by the saints that save
I would track that hound till bloody ground
Gave either of us a grave!"

His teeth gritted. I could picture the atavistic force that, in an hour of poignant emotion, had wiped out the loving woman's gentle work of years in taming this prodigal and made his placid face a writhing mask of greed for revenge. With one spidery hand on the haft of the knife still rooted where life had fled, and the other raised in his blasphemous oath, he must have been a fearful figure.

Then I noticed his glass was empty again and he sat staring into it sorrowfully, whether at seeing bottom or looking back at that vanished scene, I could not decide. I rapped the table sharply for another round. At this he leaned over again and resumed:

"Where banyans spread and snakes lift head,
I followed his tortuous trail;
Over Andes rocks in my bloodstained socks,
I kept on at pace of a snail.

"In the valley dank where in ooze we sank,
In swamp land miring us both,
I brought him to bay on the reckoning day
And wrought out my deadly oath!

"I found him then in a poisonous fen
In the thin, pale light of the moon,
And my leaping knife quested for his life

At the edge of a blue lagoon.

"Yes, I left him there with a vacant stare
And a buzzard perched on his chest,
But though he slept and my oath was kept,
It failed to give my soul rest.

"Now my end is near, but my only tear
Is because by that Great White Throne
With my loved one there on the Golden Stair
I never can claim my own.

"From this sun scorched beach I can never reach
A place on that heavenly ramp.
So, son, don't scorn at what I warn—
I'm a typical tropical tramp!"

The last words had come drooling from unsteady lips and his head had dropped, cushioned on the table by his bent arm. I paid the waiter and shoved an English note into a gaping pocket. As I rose to go, I looked around and saw Chief Officer McGuire of the steamer smiling at me. My eyes were suspiciously moist and I turned away to wave toward the derelict stranger.

"Oh, you're initiated, eh?" He laughed when I'd told him. "Old Hicks has been cadging drinks with that ballad for years. No, I never saw it printed anywhere—it's just one of those classics that pass around by word of mouth. Sure, you can use it! There's no copyright; and didn't Homer, Shakespeare—a lot of others—pick up stuff like that. Go ahead and use it." And I have.

A Perfect Target

By L. G. BLOCHMAN

A SLIM, red headed figure in a pongee suit, Forest walked rapidly through the luminous haze of a Summer morning. The frown between his reddish eyebrows and the worried look in his grave blue eyes were out of tune with the smiling aspect of Tokyo—a vast sea of gray tiled roofs seeming to undulate slightly in the blinding sunshine, a flashing of light on the wings of dragon flies, a sound of laughter in the tortuous streets. Forest climbed a slight eminence to push through a tiny garden into a two-story house. He passed through a room piled high with bronze Buddhas, stacks of brocade and carved ivories, crossed a narrow hall, and came upon Martin at the breakfast table.

Martin had a coffee cup in one hand. With the other he was arranging cards in a game of solitaire. He was a small man, with an Adam's apple that bulged prominently in a long neck. A patch of very red lip showed through a meager dark mustache which seemed a trifle moth eaten. He squinted at Forest through the smoke from a cigaret drooping at the corner of his mouth.

"Out early, aren't you, Forest?" he asked.

Forest tossed a packet of compactly folded papers to the table, sat down and ran his fingers through his red hair.

"I went out to buy the vernacular sheets," he said. "I wanted to see what they had to say about a two-line item in this morning's *Advertiser*. Has that new

English-speaking clerk come yet?"

Martin nodded toward the *fusama*, the sliding paper partition that led to the kitchen. From behind the screen emanated the soulful, if tinny, strains of music extracted from a harmonica.

"He's in there," said Martin, "giving a concert for the cook."

"Call him," said Forest. "I want him to translate something."

"Momonoki!" Martin shouted.

The music continued. In a rough way, the tune resembled "East Side, West Side".

"Momonoki!" Martin repeated.

There was no answer. He arose abruptly and slid aside the *fusama* to reveal a Japanese youth in a black and white kimono. The lad had a small harmonica pressed against his protruding lips.

"Come in here when you're called!" said Martin.

"Excuse unhearing deafness," said Momonoki, slipping his harmonica into his ample kimono sleeve and rising to his feet.

He was a solemn faced youth who at times appeared twenty-five, at others fifteen. He said he was nineteen—which meant eighteen by Occidental count, since a Japanese child is considered one year old the day after its birth. His hair was clipped close. His apparently lidless eyes peered at Forest through lenses as thick as dollar watches.

"You are first time I have witnessed foreigner with crimson hairs," he said, staring at Forest as though fascinated. "I am Momonoki. Please pronounce me youah name."

"My name's Forest. Now I want—"

"Forest? How co-incidence. My name in part is Momonoki, meaning peach tree. Forest and Peach Tree—"

"Read these papers," said Forest, impatiently pushing the packet across the table, "and translate for me anything you see regarding the robbery at the Imperial Museum yesterday."

Martin dropped his cigaret stub into his coffee cup. It died with a short hiss.

Momonoki rattled the papers.

"With immense types," he said, "newspapah *Nichi-nichi* cries Imperial Museum shamefully robberied. Two ivory *netsuké*, lended to museum from private ownings of mikado for short time exhibiting, have been stealed—"

"What do the other papers say?" interrupted Forest.

"Great indignant in all pressworks," said Momonoki, turning over the pages. "*Asahi* cry big insulting to mikado. *Jiji Shimpo* making huge rewarding of five thousand yen for clutching stealers. Police sending beg-pardon to palace . . . Museum—ah—museum— How is English word? Manager?"

"Curator."

"Museum curator, five helping curators, and nineteen janitors anticipate to resignation tomorrow if *netsuké* not homecoming."

Martin lighted another cigaret in silence. Forest nodded gravely. He wanted to know if there was a description of the *netsuké*. Yes, said Momonoki. The *Jiji Shimpo* said that not only had the *netsuké* great historical value through having graced the cords of tobacco pouches used by former emperors of Japan, but they were great works of art. One of the ivory buttons was a minute carving of a landscape garden, complete with bridges, lanterns and a five-story pagoda, and was signed by Hoshin of Kyoto. The other was a lifelike minuscule representation of two samurai in a death struggle. It was the work of the great Shuzan.

"No mention of any one suspected?" asked Forest.

"Profound mysterious," said Momonoki. "However, police overflowing with hope as well as chagrin."

"Thanks," said Forest, getting up and gently pushing Momonoki back into the kitchen.

He closed the *fusama*. Five seconds later the strains of what was probably intended to be "East Side, West Side" again came wheezily from behind the screen.

Forest turned to see Martin regarding him with curious expectancy.

"After that," said Forest, "I guess there's no need of my telling you that the ivories Strange brought me last night for appraisal are the mikado's *netsuké* stolen from the museum."

"Not the slightest need," said Martin. His bulging eyes narrowed slightly.

"What do you intend to do about it?"

"I? Nothing at all."

Forest stood up.

"Then I'd better take the *netsuké* back to the museum," he said.

Martin also got to his feet.

"Strange was a fool to leave the *netsuké* with you," he said. "But that's no reason for you to make a fool of yourself. Sit down."

"For the sake of our past association and for the firm," Forest continued, "I'm willing to give Strange a chance to get away, but—"

"Sit down!" Martin barked.

Forest hesitated a moment, then obeyed. Martin held out his hand.

"Now give me those ivories," he ordered.

Forest pressed his lips together.

"Be reasonable, Martin," he said after a pause. "You certainly aren't going to sacrifice your honesty and the honesty of the firm for the sake of a pair of ivory buttons whose intrinsic value can't be more than four or five thousand yen at most, no matter how great their sentimental value to the Japanese. You—"

"Listen," interrupted Martin. "You're an art expert. I brought you over here to tell me when a print or carving was real or phony, and, when phony, to tell me how much like what original it was. You're fine at that sort of thing. You know your dates and fusty names and market values. But as for the administration of this business—keep your nose out!"

Forest pushed back his chair and stood up again. His lips were colorless.

"My reputation," he said in a tight voice, "with collectors, the antiquarians, scholars—I can't afford—"

Forest moved forward suddenly to brush past Martin. Martin caught his right arm to pull him back. Forest whirled, swung with his left. Martin ducked, then lunged to butt the wind out of Forest.

Forest stepped back, gasping. When he recovered his breath he seized Martin by the throat, lifted him clear of the floor and started to shake him. Martin emitted a surprised gurgle.

Then darkness descended upon Forest in a roaring, flashing wave of pain. He relaxed his strangle hold and folded up like an accordion. He did not know what had hit him. He had not seen Strange come up behind to swing the barrel of a revolver against the back of his skull.

STRANGE stood astride the fallen redhead, looking down at him with expressionless eyes that seemed opaque. He was so tall that he had to stoop to clear the low lintels of Japanese doorways. He had no chin to speak of, and very little hair. His vaulted bald area was spangled with perspiration. He breathed audibly through his broad nose.

"So-o-o?" he exclaimed. "Trouble?"

He spoke in a thin, tenor drawl, surprisingly puerile for one of his bulk. His blurred T's and a tendency to prolong his O's indicated a Central European origin.

Martin was bending over the prone Forest, going through his pockets. He extracted a small case, opened it to disclose two exquisitely carved bits of ivory, as large as hazelnuts, nestling in cotton.

"He had an attack of honesty," said Martin. "He wants to take these *netsuké* back to the museum."

Strange shook his head.

"I always to-old you I didn't like that honest look in his eyes," he said.

"This is your fault!" snapped Martin. "With the whole Imperial Museum to choose from, why did you have to pick on the mikado's collection? Dumb as you are, you surely know how the Japanese feel about the mikado. The vernacular press is in an uproar, the police are

out for blood, the museum staff is going to resign, and I wouldn't be surprised if there were a cabinet crisis—all because you insulted the Son of Heaven by stealing a couple of his heirlooms. God help us if they find these here. I know we've been under suspicion before this—it's only the clever way I've been keeping our skirts clean that's kept us out of trouble. And there's the unexplained death of that Yokohama collector—what if they connect us up with that?"

"I could put them back," interrupted Strange. "I do-o-n't think it would be hard."

"Give me a hand here," said Martin, putting the *netsuké* into his pocket and bending down to grasp Forest under the armpits. "He's starting to come to. We'll carry him upstairs and tie him to his bed until we decide what we're going to do with him."

When Forest had been made fast to his own bed with ropes of rice straw Martin and Strange returned to the dining room.

"Of course, I wouldn't *like* to put them back," Strange resumed in his whining voice, "but if you—"

"Listen," said Martin. "You don't realize what a mess you've got us into. This may seem like an ordinary, run-of-the-mill larceny to you, but to the rest of Tokyo it's practically sacrilege. An ordinary larceny probably wouldn't have come to the attention of our red headed friend, who's been too wrapped up in his books to know what's been going on around him. But now that he's got his eyes open we've got to shut his mouth."

"O. K," said Strange, laying his automatic on the table. "When?"

"Put that away," ordered Martin. "You're too ready with that gun of yours. It's pure luck you're still here after that stupid murder of Kato in Yokohama."

"That wasn't stupid. They didn't catch me, did they?"

"Never mind," said Martin. "This situation is going to be handled with intelligence—that means, by me. Knowing Forest, I think I can bargain with him for a promise of silence."

"A promise," droned Strange, "ain't worth much this year."

"Forest's is," said Martin. "He's one of these rare boobs who'd break a leg rather than his word. Of course, if he won't bargain, then we'll have to use different methods. But you leave this to me. Bring the brandy and we'll go up and revive him."

Forest needed no reviving. He was not only conscious, but actively engaged in trying to escape from the bonds that held him to his bed. He stopped squirming long enough to bestow an uncompromising glance upon Martin.

"Forest," said Martin, "Strange has just pointed out to me that there's a perfect case against you for the theft of the Mikado's *netsuké*. Now, if it's apparent to Strange, it certainly—"

"Against me?" Forest broke in.

"Yes," Martin replied. "You were in the museum yesterday—"

"Only in the curator's office. I didn't go anywhere except to the curator's office."

"I have witnesses who saw you hovering about the mikado's collection," said Martin. "Japanese witnesses whose testimony in court would outweigh yours, particularly as you've been expertizing stolen goods for the past five months."

"That's a lie!"

"Half the stuff you've handled for us has been stolen," said Martin quietly. "I have your signature on a certificate guaranteeing the authenticity of some Hokusai prints stolen from Baron Iwata. I have your signature on certificates for some rare sword *tsubo* stolen from a man who was murdered in Yokohama."

Martin paused to watch the effect of his announcement. Forest moistened his lips but said nothing.

"In spite of the perfect case against you," Martin continued, "I'll do you the favor of keeping quiet, if you return the compliment by giving me your word that you'll forget you ever saw the emperor's *netsuké*."

Forest continued silent. He stared unseeing at the ceiling.

"Well?" prompted Martin.

"If you'll cut these damned ropes," said Forest at last, "I might talk to you."

Martin bent over the knots. Strange came closer to glower at Forest. Released, Forest sat up, rubbing himself.

"I can't make any such promise," he said slowly. "A guilty secret like that would make me an accomplice."

"You're already an accomplice," said Martin. "Would you rather be arrested as a thief?"

"I'd take the chance," Forest replied thoughtfully. "It wouldn't make any difference, as long as I'm not actually a thief. I've been acting in good faith—"

"Then you're turning down our proposition?"

"I'll make you a counter-proposition," said Forest. "Give me an inventory showing what part of our present stock has been stolen and from where. I'll say nothing about it for twenty-four hours. That will give you plenty of time to get out of the country."

Strange gave vent to a derisive, treble laugh.

Martin growled—

"You've got a lot of crust, wanting to dictate terms to us."

"Think it over," said Forest gravely. "Go down and talk about it between you. I'll wait here. I give you my word."

"Come on," said Martin, taking Strange by the arm.

WHEN they had gone Forest sat at a table, filled a page with writing, folded it, slipped it into an envelop. He addressed the envelop and placed it between the pages of a Japanese-English dictionary.

Downstairs Martin poured two glasses of port and spiked his own with brandy.

"I think I better take these damned buttons right to Shanghai," Strange was saying. "I think I better get them out of the country."

"What good will that do," countered Martin, swallowing his port at a single gulp, "as long as the still small voice upstairs is ready to turn into a loud speaker the first chance he gets?"

"So-o-o what?" inquired Strange.

"We'll have to get rid of both Forest and the *netsuké*," Martin announced in low tones.

"O. K." Strange grinned. Martin laid a restraining hand on his arm.

"Listen," said Martin. "You let me plan this. We've got to use strategy to keep ourselves in the clear. The *netsuké* must be found on Forest. A gun, too, if possible. That will make a perfect picture: The thief, trying to escape, killed by you in a running fight."

"Too bad." Strange shook his head. "Too damn bad to lose tho-ose *netsuké*. Think of the prestige they would give us with our customers in Shanghai."

"It will be easier to plant the gun," said Martin, "if we can stall until after dark. Let me see." He looked up, startled.

The bell on the front gate jingled lightly. Martin arose. He stopped the cook in the hall and went to the entrance himself. A Japanese stood there—a Japanese in European clothes with a "gates ajar" collar.

"I am detective," the Japanese announced. "I am K. Omura of Honjo police station. I give you my card."

"Come in, Mr. Omura," said Martin. "I suppose you're here regarding the museum robbery. Meet Mr. Strange."

The detective bowed from the waist. He spoke slowly as he drew from his pocket a number of circulars printed in Japanese.

"These are new police regulations," he said. "We must inspect all curio, arts and antique merchants in Tokyo. No art dealer can leave Tokyo without permit. You can not make exports for one month. You must report in writing all buying and selling."

"I hope you find the missing *netsuké*, Mr. Omura," said Martin, carelessly putting both hands into his pockets. "We

will be glad to cooperate."

"Otherwise," said the detective, "director of police bureau must resign to emperor in three days. Please show me your stocks."

For the next half hour the detective dug among the collected specimens in the adjoining room. He made notes. When he had finished he emerged and paused at the foot of the stairway.

"What is upstairs?" he asked.

"Just living quarters," said Martin. "Nobody's up there."

At the same moment a blast of tinny music floated down from the upper floor. A succession of chords, inhaled and exhaled, followed, to make an enthusiastic rendition of "There'll Be A Hot Time In The Old Town Tonight" on a harmonica.

"Nobody?" queried the detective.

"Unless it's our clerk," amended Martin. "He sometimes goes up there to practise his music. Would you like to go up?"

The detective paused with one foot on the bottom step.

"You have other member of this house?" he inquired.

"There's Mr. Forest," said Martin. "He's out right now. We expect him back at any time. Would you like to wait?"

"I will come back," said the detective. "I must inspect your house one time, maybe two times, each day. I must now inspect other houses. Goodby."

When K. Omura had gone, Martin, followed by Strange, bounded up the stairs. They found Momonoki kneeling on the floor of Forest's room, working lustily on his harmonica. The Japanese youth had come up to translate an item on the *netsuké* robbery from the latest edition of the *Hochi Shimbun*. He had remained to discuss the relative merits of the bamboo flute, of which he was very fond, and this foreign instrument, now quite popular in Japan, the harmonica. He had learned these foreign airs from the book of instructions given away free with the instrument. He would play some of them.

"Stop that racket!" bellowed Martin, as he and Strange entered the room. Momonoki's solo ended with a wheeze.

"I overheard some of what went on downstairs just now," said Forest.

"What did you hear?" demanded Martin. His Adam's apple moved nervously.

"A few words of the interview with Mr. Omura of the Honjo police station. I consider myself lucky that I didn't have the *netsuké* on my person, otherwise I don't doubt that you would have pointed me out as the thief. I was very much tempted to come down and denounce the actual thief, but I'd given my word that I'd wait here. Are you going to accept my proposition?"

"No," said Martin.

He paused to watch Forest. Forest moistened his lips. During the pause Momonoki raised his harmonica and breathed three asthmatic chords before Martin bore down on him

"Give me that damned thing!" Martin snatched the harmonica and dropped it into the side pocket of his alpaca coat. "What are you doing here anyway? Go down to the kitchen and tell the cook to serve tiffin."

Momonoki looked inquiringly at Forest. Forest nodded.

"Yes," said Forest. "Go."

Momonoki made a quick exit.

Martin turned to Forest.

"When I said no," he began, "perhaps I should have said that we would agree to your proposition with a few slight modifications."

"Too late," said Forest curtly.

"You mean?"

"I mean I can't give you my word now. It's every man for himself—"

He did not finish his sentence. At a nod from Martin, Strange seized Forest from behind. There was a brief struggle, during which a chair was broken, Martin's nose was bloodied and Forest received a black eye. In less than two minutes Forest was again lying on his bed, bound hand and foot, with a gag between his teeth.

Martin produced the little box con-

taining the stolen *netsuké* and placed it carefully in the breast pocket of the captive's coat.

"Just in case," he explained to Strange. "Come on. Let's eat some tiffin."

MOMONOKI was eating with the cook, a middle aged contralto with a piece of string wound about her body to keep her long kimono sleeves from dipping into the pots. He helped her to the extent of setting a bowl of rice on the *kami-dana,* a shelf on which stood a tiny shrine dedicated to Kojin, god of the cook stove. Then he allowed himself to be fed with some of the *nihon-no-shoku* the cook prepared for herself; she could never bring herself to eat the queer exotic dishes she made for the foreigners in the next room.

Momonoki told her of his bewilderment by this, his first day in a foreign household. He had had some difficulty in understanding what was going on, because the foreigners spoke too rapidly and did not pronounce their words in the same manner as Professor Nakamura, who had taught him English in Middle School. However, he thought he had understood the man with the crimson hairs, Forest-*san.* Forest-*san* had given him a letter and said that, when he gave the sign, Momonoki was to hurry with it to the Imperial Museum, as it was important. A few moments later Forest-*san* had nodded his head up and down and said:

"Yes. Go."

Translated, this meant *"Ikemasu."* He supposed that this was the sign in question, and, since Forest-*san* had said the letter was important, he would hurry with it—after tiffin. What did the cook think, with her superior knowledge of foreigners and foreign ways?

The cook, having scraped her chopsticks on the bottom of her rice bowl as she sucked in the last grains of *chawan-meshi* that ended the meal, smoked her *kiseru*—a thimble at the end of a pencil, containing exactly three puffs to the smoke. She thought Momonoki was probably right. She personally liked Forest-*san* the best of the three, although he had been there only a short time. He sometimes came in and tasted the things she was cooking for herself. She was afraid, however, that he was not very bright. He was always studying in books. A person of ordinary brightness was through learning from books long before he had reached the age of Forest-*san.*

Now, Martin-*san* never bothered with books. He played games with himself, with pieces of cardboard. When he did not win, he was irritable. He was apt to be irritable anyhow, and was often given to shouting. Still, his mustache was quite amusing, and all in all she liked him better than Strange-*san.* Strange-*san* had a mouth like a carp and a voice like a sheep. He was often away at the factory where new ivories were boiled in the juice of the *yasha* tree to make them old, and Osaka brocades were smoked until they became brocades of past centuries . . . By this time Martin-*san* was probably playing his game with pieces of cardboard. If Momonoki cared to watch, he would find a small hole in *fusama* at the left near the bottom.

Momonoki peeked. He saw Martin nervously laying out cards in rows. He saw Strange paring an apple with infinite care to remove the peel in an unbroken ribbon. Strange was saying:

"What do you suppo-ose he meant, 'Every man for himself'?"

"Bluff," Martin replied. "What else could it mean? What could he have done all by himself? He didn't move from that room."

"What next, then?" Strange asked.

"We'll leave him as he is for the rest of the afternoon. As soon as it's dark I'll tell him we've had a change of heart and turn him loose. That's when you perform."

Momonoki didn't listen to any more. It didn't make sense to him. Besides, he had his errand to perform for Forest-*san.*

Martin looked up from his solitaire to

see Momonoki hurrying down the hall. He arose and listened. He heard the entrance *shoji* slide open and shut. With a word to Strange, he followed.

A Summer shower was converting Tokyo into a vast mud puddle. Across the street, at the end of a double row of cryptomerias, stood the rain blurred outlines of a *torii*, or gateway to a Shinto shrine. In the distance, beyond a monotonous expanse of wet and glistening tiled roofs, could be seen a segment of the pine fringed moat that surrounded the mikado's palace.

Fifty yards down the street was Momonoki, swinging along with the queer gait occasioned by his wet weather *geta* —wooden clogs on stilts tall enough to keep him out of the mud. His kimono was tucked up about his thighs as a precaution against splashing. He carried a brown oiled paper umbrella over his shoulder, so that from the rear only his bare legs showed below the scalloped edge—legs slightly bowed from having sat astride his mother's back as an infant—giving Martin the impression that the youth might be naked.

Martin overtook him as he was turning a corner and hailed him in English. Momonoki turned.

"Ah. Good day," he said.

He beamed, raising his stiff brimmed straw hat. Martin seemed very cordial. Momonoki offered to share his umbrella.

"Please to come undah parachute because of rain," he said.

"Thanks," said Martin. "You going far?"

"Going until Uyeno Park," Momonoki replied. "Not immoderate far."

"I'm going to Uyeno Park, myself," said Martin. "Maybe I can save you the walk. Can't I do something for you?"

"I am transporting note until Imperial Museum. We say *Teikoku Hakubutsukwan.*"

"Give it to me. I'll take it for you," said Martin quickly.

"It is hurry-up of great momentous," said Momonoki.

"All right, all right." Martin was impatient. "Give it to me. I'll see that it's delivered."

"Aw right, aw right," echoed Momonoki, glad to be relieved of his errand by a responsible party.

All foreigners were responsible. He had learned in school that foreigners were responsible for the telephone, the steam engine, the electric light, the camera, even the rickshaw. He handed over the envelop.

"Now I am returning to house," he said.

"Never mind going back now," said Martin. "Take the afternoon off. Here's fifty sen. Have a good time. Don't hurry back."

When Momonoki had disappeared down the street Martin opened the envelop addressed to the curator of the Imperial Museum. He read:

> I have located the *netsuké* stolen from the museum yesterday. Circumstances will probably prevent my bringing them to you. Come to the above address immediately on receipt of this note, bringing adequate police escort.
>
> —FRED FOREST

Martin chuckled grimly. Strange would laugh when he showed him this. He slipped the letter into his coat pocket and returned to the house.

Strange was still seated at the table, smoking, making designs on the tablecloth with his long curl of apple peeling.

"The redhead was making a rumpus," said Strange. "He tipped over the bed. I had to go-o up and bash him to keep him quiet. I think we better end the who-ole business now."

"No," said Martin. "It's got to be properly staged. You leave it to me. I've managed everything all right so far. I just caught that dumb Jap kid sneaking out with a note from Forest to the museum. It's lucky I had the brains to catch him, or this place would be overrun with fussy little Jap cops in fifteen minutes."

"Twenty minutes," Strange corrected. "It takes them five minutes to buckle on

their swords."

"Anyhow, it gives me an idea," said Martin.

He went upstairs to look at the captive.

"Ready to talk business now?" he inquired.

Forest stared at him, but gave no sign of acquiescence. Martin verified the knots and climbed back down the stairs.

The rainy afternoon dissipated into a hot, sultry evening. Martin had hung his alpaca coat on a rack in the hall and sat in his shirt sleeves, playing solitaire, while perspiration beaded his mustache and polished his Adam's apple. He was drinking port and brandy, half and half. Strange sat across from him, as grave as a poker player trying to conceal the fact that he had filled a royal flush. He was cleaning his automatic. Forest was still bound and gagged upstairs. It was eight o'clock.

Momonoki, having been told by Martin that his presence would be required later in the evening, was in the kitchen. He had spent the afternoon—and Martin's fifty sen—industriously amusing himself. He had gorged himself into a slightly nauseous state with four purple bars of *kuri-no-yokan*—sweet, chestnut studded bean paste. He had stumbled upon the first insect bazaar of the Summer and had spent an hour listening to the ear piercing chorus of a thousand cicadas, each imprisoned in a tiny bamboo cage awaiting a buyer to appreciate its shrill song. The cages were clustered according to price and priced according to the tone, volume and diligence. The big, busy, clear toned males were beyond Momonoki's means, but he bought a cheap one.

FROM the time of his purchase until he had brought it home, Momonoki's cicada had not emitted a single note. At eight o'clock he and the cook were examining the tiny cage with great concern. They wondered if the *semi-ya* had not cheated Momonoki by selling him a female cicada. It was perhaps just as well, the cook said. Martin-*san* might object to cicadas. He was always objecting to things, without reason. For instance, he objected to such delicacies as raw carp and boiled red octopus, yet he reveled in an imported atrocity called *cheesu*, which was nothing less than rotten milk and stank abominably.

At this point the cicada suddenly filled the night with a loud, strident ringing. The shrill clamor continued on a maddening monotone. Momonoki blinked with pleasure behind his thick glasses. The cook remarked that the cicada sang as well as if it were an expensive one.

At the end of three strident minutes the voice of Martin was raised in annoyed competition.

"Momonoki!" he bellowed.

Momonoki reluctantly left his caged singer to go into the next room.

"That a cicada in there?" Martin demanded.

"Ah. Cicada," Momonoki concurred. "In Japanese we say *semi*. Harmonious insect."

"Bring it here!" Martin ordered.

The cicada stopped singing when Momonoki placed the cage on the table in front of Martin. Martin examined it without touching it.

"Curious insect, singing with stomach," explained Momonoki. "Boy *semi* more songful than girl *semi*."

As though to illustrate, the cicada burst into its shrill monotone.

Martin brought down his hand in a crushing blow upon the flimsy cage. The sound stopped. Martin brushed the débris to the floor.

"Throw this out!" he ordered. "And don't bring in any more."

Momonoki retreated to the kitchen, resigned to an evening without music. If only he had his bamboo flute. Or even his confiscated harmonica. He wondered if he couldn't retrieve his harmonica from Martin-*san's* coat hanging in the hall.

Martin looked at his watch. It was a little after eight. He continued his game

of solitaire. He made it come out and smiled to himself as he gathered up the cards.

"It's about dark enough now," he said to Strange. "In twenty minutes you can go out and stand in the shadow of the trees across the street. At nine o'clock our friend upstairs will come out, bound for the museum. He'll be in a hurry. His light pongee coat ought to make a perfect target for you. He'll—"

Martin stopped abruptly and stood up. There was a rattling and banging noise outside the house. Martin laughed nervously and sat down again. He recognized the noise as the cook putting up the wooden shutters to cover the paper screens. The house would be hotter than ever, but police regulations required the shutters at night. When the last one was in place the night grew heavy with the queer, thick silence of a Japanese city, a silence accentuated by isolated sounds: the faint, falsetto cry of a distant *soba* vender; the hollow, wooden knocking of the night watchman, reassuring the populace of his vigilance for fires.

"I'm going to write a chit to the police," Martin resumed, "accusing Forest and asking for help against a desperate man. I'll send the Jap kid with the chit just before nine o'clock. The cops will get here just after you've done your work. My chit will explain everything and put us in the clear."

"I'll do a neat job," said Strange, grinning. He munched an apple until Martin looked at his watch again and said—

"You'd better go now."

Strange arose, patted his hip pocket and lumbered out. As he stepped into the hall he collided with a silent, swift moving body. He grappled a second before the man he was choking could gasp—

"I am Momonoki."

Strange dragged him into the light. Momonoki was bareheaded and out of breath, as if he had been running.

"Where you been?" Strange demanded suspiciously.

"Ah. Where?" panted Momonoki. "In next street made purchasing of trifling cigaret."

Strange promoted Momonoki toward the kitchen with the toe of his heavy shoe. Then he said to Martin—

"Any time, now."

He went out. Martin climbed the stairs and removed the gag from between Forest's teeth.

"I apologize, boy," said Martin. "You're right, and I've come around to your way of thinking. Strange is going to take the blame and he's leaving the country. You and I will stay here and run this business on the level. I'll cut you loose and you can take the *netsuké* over to the museum. They won't come after them, because I intercepted that note you tried to send by Momonoki. There's only one condition. I promised Strange you wouldn't do anything until nine o'clock. He's gone down to Yokohama and his boat sails at nine."

"What time is it now?"

"Ten minutes to nine."

"Cut me loose," said Forest. "I'll wait ten minutes."

Martin freed him. He got up stiffly. His first move was to take out the small box Martin had put into his pocket. He opened it to make sure the *netsuké* still nestled in the cotton. His eyes shone with exultation.

Martin returned to the ground floor. He sat at the table, took pencil and paper and began to indite his note to the police, the note that would accuse a dead man. He smiled as he heard Forest moving about upstairs.

Suddenly he stopped writing. He looked up, listening. Some one was playing the harmonica in the kitchen, wheezy chords which sounded vaguely like "There'll Be A Hot Time In The Old Town Tonight". The exact import of the harmonica music did not at once occur to Martin, but the tinny strains produced in his subconscious a dim sense of foreboding that grew as he listened. He stood up. He took a step toward the kitchen, then paused.

THE harmonica music had stopped, but there was still sound in his ears—a far, frantic squawking, as though old fashioned bulb horns were being squeezed on many autos. The sound grew louder.

Thoughts clicked like cogs in Martin's mind. The meaning of the harmonica music flashed upon him. He went quickly to the hall and thrust his hands into the pockets of his alpaca coat that hung there. He swore.

He heard Forest at the top of the stairs. He heard the squawking of horns. He heard Momonoki playing the harmonica. Damn that Jap kid! The whole scheme was askew now. He knew what those squawking horns meant. He would rush over to warn Strange.

Martin hurried out the door in his shirt sleeves, across the two-by-four garden, out the high wooden gate. His white shirt gleamed in the darkness of the street. He ran toward the lane of cryptomerias where Strange was waiting.

Flame flared twice in the shadow of the cryptomerias. A double explosion burst on the night and echoed from the roofs like distant thunder.

Martin coughed, stumbled. He got up, shouting something inarticulate. He fell on his face in the muddy street.

Strange emerged from behind the trees, his automatic still in his hand. He tossed a second gun to the ground beside the figure that lay still at his feet. He looked up as two motor cars drove into the street and stopped. Policemen in white duck uniforms swarmed from the cars.

"Here he is, gents," said Strange to the first policeman to reach him. "This is the bird who stole your—"

He stopped. With his foot he had turned over the man who lay in the mud. His jaw dropped as he peered into Martin's face.

More motor cars were arriving. Policemen were jabbering to Strange in Japanese. He shook his head, bewildered, muttering. He was disarmed without a struggle. A policeman was tying his hands behind his back with a piece of cord.

Forest was pushing his way through the crowd that now blocked the narrow street. A distinguished looking elderly Japanese wearing a silk *haori* cloak got out of a motor car to grasp Forest's arm.

"*Netsuké motte kimasuka?*" he demanded of Forest.

Forest pressed a small box into the old man's hand.

"I was on my way to bring them to you," he said.

The old man embraced him.

In the kitchen of the house Momonoki was engrossed in his rendition of "There'll Be A Hot Time In The Old Town Tonight" on his recovered harmonica. At the first pause the cook ventured to inquire what had taken Momonoki so inordinately long to retrieve his instrument from the pocket of Martin-*san's* coat, which, after all, hung only a few steps away in the hall. She had fallen asleep waiting for him to return.

Momonoki explained that while seeking his instrument he had come across a note which Forest-*san* had given him to deliver that afternoon and which he in turn had entrusted to Martin-*san*. Martin-*san* had apparently forgotten to deliver it, and inasmuch as Forest-*san* had said the note was important, there was nothing for Momonoki to do but make belated delivery as quickly as possible. He had run both ways.

"I am sorry for your sake for this miserable delay," he said.

"Make no further mention," said the cook. "Please continue with your glorious music."

Momonoki had blown the first chords of "Home, Sweet Home" before he became aware of the fact that the house was full of policemen.

JUSTICE
And a Prizefighter

By JAMES W. BENNETT

DIRECTIONS and the giving of them is a delightfully or an annoyingly vague business on that paradisaical island of the South Seas, Tahiti. The annoyance comes at first, when the American is still geared to the faster, more furious pace of the Western Hemisphere. Later, as his nerves loosen, strand by strand, he accepts the native lack of exactitude. It even becomes a symbol of a more rational life.

I had asked Louvina, proprietress of my hotel, to direct me to the stadium where, I had heard, a prizefight was to be given. After frowning in unaccustomed concentration, she had suddenly relaxed and murmured:

"You go toward the way the sun 'as set. Just 'bout ten leaps of a flying fish."

So, that evening, I followed the path of a sun which had been set an hour and tried to estimate the length of each leap of that gleaming silver dart, the flying fish. On and on I walked in the velvet, perfumed night—but no fight stadium loomed before me. Nor did I note any crowd converging upon the edifice.

For a time the road remained deserted, then I distinguished a man's figure in the gloom ahead of me. I hurried toward him. He proved to be a powerfully muscled young man with a flower wreath in his hair. He was dancing a *pas seul* in the roadway—a sight not at all uncommon in Tahiti. To accompany his movement he was singing, with some fervor, "Won't you come home, Beel Bailee?"

The song and the dance ceased abruptly; he smiled and gave me the Tahitian greeting: *"Ia ora na!"* which is used alternately as a hail or a farewell.

I echoed it and then, in the best French I could muster, I asked—

"Où est le combat des boxeurs?"

He stared at me, apparently puzzled by my execrable French accent. Then he said proudly:

"I spik Engleesh. I have made treep to San Frensasca. W'at you want?"

"I want to know where the prizefight is being held?"

"Hah!" His voice promptly rose to a bellow and he smiled delightedly at me. "Hah! You ask right man! *I* am prizefight! I am grrreatest prizefight in these islands! Tonight I fight lil Americain sailorrr. He come ashore from steamer. He say he can whip all man, big, lil, all. I say he damlie. Just then I want to whip him, to prrove that he damlie. But no, pipples all say, 'Wait, wait! You must fight in beeg beelding—all same place where you go to see moving pic'.'"

So that was my destination, Tahiti's one motion picture house. The proprietress of my hotel had—characteristically—neglected to tell me this.

My informant thumped his broad chest.

"Tonight we mak' fight. My frien's have bet five t'ousand franc' on me—one t'ousand dollar in San Frensasca money. If I win, I get one fourth. And I win! Damn, I feel good!"

To show that he did "feel good", he danced gravely before me on the deserted road. It was a slow, graceful step, wonderfully sinuous. It ended with a startling twist of abdominal muscles.

He looked naively to me for applause. With some embarrassment, I said:

"Very good. Now, if you'll show me the way to the motion picture house? I'm all turned around here, in this dark."

He seemed a little crestfallen by my lack of enthusiasm, but he started to walk rapidly down the lane. As we went, he volunteered:

"I am not only grrreatest prizefight in Tahiti, I am grrreatest dancer, too! By damn, but I have mos' naughty leetle weegle in worrld! Girl, she go crazee over me! Every girl!" Then his face darkened. "But I must get in mind to fight. Must not feel too good! Must get mad!"

We turned a corner. Before us, lighted by one dim and flyblown electric bulb over the door, was the motion picture house. From inside came a confused, roaring noise. I realized now why I had not seen any crowd converging upon the place—the throng was already there.

TWO Tahitian youths were boxing languidly. Even the uproar from the audience—which I had heard from the outside when approaching the building—failed to stimulate them. I glanced about me. The first two or three rows of backless benches were occupied by Frenchmen in tropic whites. Behind them stretched row after row of Polynesians.

The bell rang. Apparently I had arrived just at the finish of a semi-final contest. The boxers bowed politely to the referee and stalked off the stage. The official remained in the ring. He was a rotund, but active, little man in the uniform of a chief petty officer of the French navy, evidently from the lone gunboat stationed in the harbor.

The referee also acted as fight judge and announcer. He stated somewhat unenthusiastically that the preceding fight had been a draw. He spoke first in French and then in Tahitian.

He then drew himself to his full five feet five inches of height and, in an impressive voice, desired the audience to remain silent while he told them of the next bout.

That, he said, was to be a battle unique in Tahiti, unique in the world. The champion of the Islands, a *boxeur charmant*, admirable, exquisite, superb, marvelous, *magnifique*, would fight ten rounds, three minutes each, for the supremacy of the South Pacific. His opponent would be one "Dzack Smeeth", greatest box fighter of America, redoubtable champion of San Francisco, of Los Angeles.

As the referee was beginning a fourth repetition of his theme, my Tahitian friend who had danced in the roadway appeared at the back of the stage. The ovation which followed drowned the announcer's peroration. The Frenchman scowled heartily, opened his mouth and, for a moment, tried to combat the appalling volume of sound. Then he closed his lips and bowed to the inevitable.

The Tahitian was clad in a breech clout wound with the tricolor. He smiled widely, displaying the usual perfect white teeth of the Polynesian. Then he flexed his arms for the crowd. Their approval reached the proportions of one vast scream, as his bulging muscles quivered and danced.

Well they might cheer, I thought, for he was a splendid physical specimen. In weight he must have tipped the scales at a hundred and sixty pounds.

Then the American seaman came on. He was an ill favored specimen with beetling brows and prognathous jaw. His manner was furtive, his motions awkward. I took an immediate dislike to him. So strong was my feeling, I did not realize for a space that the match was distinctly unfair to him. He was giving the Tahitian at least twenty pounds in weight and was forfeiting an appreciable reach. The sailor looked pale and shaky, as though his training had been more on mixed ale than on beefsteaks, although I comprehended that the effect was partly due to the contrast between his skin, which was fair,

and that of his brown opponent.

The two contestants shook hands. The seconds left the ring. The bell rang and the fight began.

In business-like fashion, crouching, the American rushed his adversary. The Tahitian straightened him with a sharp uppercut to the side of the jaw. The audience had stilled for an instant, and I could hear the sound of the impact. The pair engaged in a moment's in-fighting. The referee parted them, and I could see two harsh, red welts that spread rapidly over the stomach and heart of the seaman.

They sparred for a space, and then the Tahitian whipped over a stinging right cross to the sailor's eye. The smaller man blinked and rubbed the optic with his glove. During the remainder of the contest, that eye grew more and more salmon colored.

Again that snake-like brown arm darted out, and the poor sailor spat forth a tooth. The Tahitian was unmarked. Insofar as I could judge, he had not received a single telling blow.

I was puzzled. The American had the earmarks, literally, of a fighter: the thickened flesh of the ear lobes, the nose flattened at the tip. His manner of fighting was professional: the weaving crouch, the bobbing head . . . Then I began to understand. The fault did not lie in him. He was simply outclassed—not alone in weight and reach, but in skill. The Tahitian was a natural fighter with finer footwork and with timing that was definitely more precise.

My sympathies shifted; I began to feel sorry for the sailor who was receiving such a drubbing. The second round was a repetition of the first. The seaman was now sedulously guarding his one good eye, the other being swollen practically shut. His work became completely defensive. The rare moments that he led, the Tahitian laced in with stinging left or right that sent the seaman back on his heels. Once the American's knees buckled, but he fell into a clinch and weathered the round.

Why, I wondered, didn't his seconds throw in a towel? This was needless cruelty. But the third round saw him, battered and weary, walking slowly out to meet his magnificent adversary.

Midway through that third round, the Tahitian knocked the sailor to the canvas. The seaman reached his knees and took a count of nine. Rising to his feet, he clinched, holding desperately, so that the referee had difficulty in separating him from his adversary.

As the official tugged at the interlaced arms, I heard him ask the sailor in broken English if the man could go on. The seaman gasped:

"Go on? Hell, yes! I'll get—dis baby—yet!"

The bell for the fourth round clanged. The seaman rose and staggered to the center of the ring. He gazed blearily about him, practically out on his feet . . .

But no opponent faced him. The Tahitian sat in his corner, breathing easily, smiling, but refusing to move. The referee rushed over to him and implored him to rise and fight. But he answered in soft voweled French:

"*Mais non.* Enough have I fought. I have proved myself his superior. Have I not knocked him down? Have I not hurt him? Closed for him the poor eye?"

"But you will lose!" shrieked the rotund Frenchman, dancing up and down before him. "Do you not comprehend? I shall have to declare him the winner!"

The Tahitian's smile faded.

"That would be very wrong of you. Not to give me the decision when I have proved myself his superior. Yet, even so, I am not cruel. To fight more would be most cruel. Look at him; he is sick. I do not fight with sick men."

The referee ran a hand through his hair and actually gave it a tug as though he contemplated tearing out a lock. Then, with the most profound shrug that I have ever seen, he walked over to the sailor and lifted the American's hand.

From the winner's thickened, bleeding lips came a croak—

"Aw, I knew I'd get dis baby!"

THE STORY THUS FAR:

JOSEPH BUDD was captured by Indians while reconnoitering the position of the Tories encamped in the valleys of the Mohawk and Schoharie Rivers. In their village he discovered a man he was commissioned to arrest—Old Raoul, a trader believed to be a British spy. To Budd's amazement, Raoul aided him to escape. Making his way back to the American Middle Fort, the scout discovered a Red Cabin in the wildernes which proved to be a storehouse of supplies for the British. Budd believed Old Raoul to be its owner.

At the fort Budd made his report to Colonel Vroman; and in turn was disturbed to learn that Betsy, his fiancée, and her stepfather, Atel Grankin, had mysteriously disappeared from their cabin near Onistagrawa Mountain. Vroman explained that many American settlers on the mountain had seen strange lights by night, and believed the eminence to be inhabited by devils.

After nightfall Budd set forth for the mountain. He decided the lights were the work of some British agent signaling information of the Americans. His surmise proved to be true. Suddenly coming upon a man leading two huge dogs, the scout killed one animal, wounded another so it turned on its keeper and mauled him fatally. The

Concluding

THE RED TRAPS

By HUGH PENDEXTER

dying man managed to utter the name "Colliger" before expiring. Budd believed Colliger to be a friend of Major Wemple, an American commander.

Budd immediately proceeded to Colliger's country estate, which could be seen from the mountaintop. There he was received cordially. He managed to slip away from his host long enough to find in one of the upper rooms of the house a huge candle reflector used for signaling at night. A code book fixed Colliger's guilt as a spy.

That night Budd was awakened by an Oneida squaw, known as the Keeper of the False Faces, whom he had befriended in the past. She told him to flee for his life. The American prepared to heed the warning, but before he could get away Colliger and his bullies attacked. The scout managed to fire the house and make good his escape.

Making his way downriver, he fell in with three ruffians about to ravage the cabin of a lone woman. Budd fought and killed the attackers and put the woman on the road to the American fort. He then headed for the nearby Johnstown where, the woman told him, he would find the leader of the guerrillas.

At Johnstown the scout found a group of rough looking men amusing themselves throwing an ax at the painted figure of an American soldier. At sight of Budd they converged upon him ominously. Just then another man burst from the bush growth.

"Boys, our three friends won't come back! All dead, close to the woman's house. How she ever done 'em in—"

Every eye fixed Budd with baleful intent; every hand gripped an ax murderously.

SIMON, the leader of the guerrilla band, opened his eyes widely. His gaze became an interrogation. Budd nodded and reminded him:

"Yes. I told you I left them there. They died in the house. I didn't need to use my rifle." To the others he cried, "Fall in! Double file! For the last time, fall in! You, newcomer—you're under arrest. Fall in at the end of the line."

They hesitated, glancing uneasily at one another, then at Budd. Then a man advanced and stood beside Simon. Once the example was set the others, like sheep, did as ordered. The bearer of news hurried forward, as if fearing he might be overlooked. Budd ordered him to bring up the rear. Then he stepped aside and gave the word to march. The short column advanced, making toward the river. Budd walked behind, ready to pick off the first to bolt.

Conducting the seven prisoners down the river was impossible unless he received aid. Once they entered the road and mingled with the scattered groups of fugitives, they would dodge and run, using the innocent as shields.

When they came to Budd's horse the scout was quick to swing into the saddle. Now his position was vastly improved, but not sufficient to herd the prisoners for any distance without some being able to escape. When nearly abreast the woman's cabin he was highly pleased to behold twelve American riflemen loping down the road from the west. They came up at a run. The leader took in the situation at a glance. He called out:

"You seem to be ahead of us, forest runner. We're out from Fort Schuyler on patrol. We were told there are some disaffected men in this neighborhood, frightening the people."

"Too tame a word. These men are Royal Greens. They attack defenseless women. They loot and murder. How did you get the word about them?"

"Word was brought to our captain, posted three miles above. That is all we know except I heard the man call himself Grankin."

"There was a young lady with him?" eagerly asked Budd.

The man was surprised; then he smiled grimly and shook his head.

"You can identify yourself? You're on service?"

"He's one of Sir John Johnson's men!" yelped Simon.

Budd handed down Major Wemple's paper. The rifleman read it and nodded. He ordered the prisoners to be searched for weapons. Then he extended his hand to Budd, and was polite enough to say:

"I can't see that you need any assistance. However, I will take over the prisoners and will give you a receipt for them so Major Wemple will know you have been busy."

"There are three more of this band near the road, close by. They should be buried," Budd informed the leader of the group.

"In God's grace, how did they die?" demanded the leader of the riflemen.

"They attacked a cabin, housing a soldier's wife and little child. She had fled before they came and entered. They found me inside instead. We had a wring with knives and clubs. I dragged them close to the road so they would not defile the house . . . Now I must be off to overtake Grankin. I'm on a special service and he may be able to give me some information."

Simon, overawed by the riflemen until now, found his voice. He cursed Grankin by name most savagely, and concluded by calling after Budd—

"When you see that lanky scut of a Grankin you tell him for me I'll cut his throat the first time we meet."

The leader of the riflemen quieted him by softly saying:

"Your throat cutting days are over, my fine fellow. Jails are few and poorly guarded. Left file, march!"

The prisoners turned off the road and into a thin growth near where the three dead men were awaiting burial. As Budd rode to the north he heard a shrill cry, and then a vicious, crackling volley. He knew his prisoners would never be delivered either to Fort Hunter or Fort Schuyler.

CHAPTER VII

KIRT'S TAVERN

BUDD was confident that both Grankin and the girl were ahead of him and that he soon would overtake the couple. It surprised him none that Grankin was very active in doing his duty. A dour type was Grankin—a zealot when faced by what he considered to be his obligation. The scout also believed that the somber man would surrender his own flesh and blood did he deem them to be traitors. The loneliness of the frontiers often produced this type of man, who stood apart from genial fellowship; men who read omens and portents in the skies and stars and who believed themselves to be the inexorable agents of fate, which in their fanatic zeal they called God.

As a neighbor the scout had been quick to observe how Betsy's stepfather was most exacting in those trifles of life which really did not matter. The man was incapable of being neutral, but always was for or against to an inexorable degree. And the scout was thankful the one-track mind had not disapproved his courting the maid.

Ten miles from the scene of the American riflemen's speedy justice, Budd camped at the edge of the road. He picketed his horse and ate bread and cheese from his wallet, then rolled in his blanket. His resting place was in sight of the Palatine village. Before sunrise he was up and finishing the remainder of his simple fare and quenching his thirst at a spring. He had bought his food at a little cabin which he suspected to be Tory in principle, and he would not have been surprised had he been pursued and attacked. There were no signs of his being trailed, however.

The country was hilly on both sides of the river, and Big Nose and Little Nose stood out ruddily with what was left of their Autumn finery. Entering the settlement, Budd commenced a house to house search for information concerning Grankin and the maid. He would have continued on up the river, unencouraged by any clues, if it had not happened that a Dutchman, who ran the flatboat ferry, was finishing his breakfast when Budd called to buy some provisions. With no expectation of learning definite news, he was hugely pleased when the man recognized the description of Grankin and said he had set him across to the Canajoharie side three days back.

The scout was greatly troubled, however, when the man leisurely insisted that Grankin was unaccompanied by any woman. With no sanctuary for a woman nearer than Schenectady, the mystery of the maid's disappearance was both baffling and alarming. There was but one move to be made, however—to overtake Grankin and learn of the girl. As soon as the man finished his meal the scout hired him to set him across the river.

They landed above the wild Canajoharie gorge and at the beginning of the road General Clinton built to Otsego Lake in the preceding year. Budd went immediately to the house of Goshen Van Alstine, which was famous the length of the valley as being the meeting place of the Tryon County Committee of Safety.

Fortunately Van Alstine was at home. After examining Budd's credentials he frankly told him that he feared a second attack on the little settlement by the forces gathering at Unadilla. It was only a month since the hamlet had been struck and most of the houses burned. He gave one peculiar incident of the

raid, the capture of John Abeel by his son, Cornplanter, the most intelligent of all the Seneca leaders, and the one man of whom Red Jacket and Brant were jealous. Abeel was sent back to his white family by his famous halfbreed son.

Budd was not interested in anything beyond the object of his quest. He assured his host that the village, already partly destroyed, scarcely could be the object of a second attack so long as the fruitful valley of the Schoharie might be raided.

Van Alstine sensed that his guest was moody. He asked:

"Have you any official business with me, Mr. Budd? Your papers entitle you to any help I can give."

"I am seeking Old Raoul, a ginseng trader."

"I am positive he has not been on this side of the river."

"I have a personal errand besides my official business. I am looking for a man by the name of Grankin. He is a man of very fixed convictions and is most ardent to serve our United States. He set forth from our valley with his stepdaughter. I have trailed him, but have lost trace of the girl. I am worried about her. Grankin will take her into any danger if his path leads to what he considers to be his duty. The ferryman says he landed him here three days ago. He is tall, spare of build and his face and manner are very melancholy."

"Yes, he stopped here at what's left of the village and bought a horse. Whether he crossed back to the north side, or took the Otsego road, I do not know. I did not see him to talk with him. No maid was with him. He scarcely would travel down the Clinton Road where he soon would run into evil company."

"Duty with him is a mania," sighed Budd. "I must find him and learn what he has done with Mistress Betsy."

Van Alstine was silent for a bit. Presently he said:

"I've stated no woman was with him. I may be mistaken. I did glimpse some one in the edge of the growth while he was here. Until this moment I never thought of associating Mistress Eckson with that figure. The person I saw near where one would enter the growth to cut into the Clinton Road was dressed as a male. I assumed it was one of the village lads. If it was a girl then she was dressed as a youth."

Budd slapped his knee and exclaimed:

"Your boy may be the girl. Several times I was told that a man, answering to Grankin's appearance, was ahead of me. Only, he was accompanied by a boy instead of a girl. I never suspected she might be in disguise. For that reason I had small belief in reports of such a couple. I am in your debt, sir. I must be off."

"But you are ordered to capture a Frenchman named Raoul," reminded Van Alstine. "Your duty to your country comes first."

Budd reddened beneath his coat of tan, and demanded—

"How can you know my secret instructions?"

"My committee is thoroughly trusted and is kept well informed."

Budd defended himself, saying:

"But I have sought Old Raoul closely. Several times I was just behind him while riding up the north side of the river. When I believed I should overtake him he vanished into thin air. I'm convinced he made into Canada over the Sacandaga path. I can not chase him into that country to find him."

"That would be asking too much," gravely agreed Van Alstine. "I am sure you will do your full duty. You are determined to go down the Clinton Road. A few words of caution: Beware of Kirt's place ten miles south of here. He runs a tavern, but such a tavern! 'Tis said people go into his tavern, but are never seen to come out. And are never seen again in any place.

"Much of it is frontier gossip, of course. I know of no real proof of such charges. Kirt's bad name came from

the charge that he killed his young wife in a fit of anger. He announced he had sent her back to her people in Massachusetts. With the country in a turmoil and communication with the New England often interrupted, no one has examined into the case. Yet it is a fact that she disappeared. When last seen she was in the tavern. When this business with the Old Country is finished we shall investigate Kirt."

BUDD took his departure, but before entering the forest road he went to the river, called the Dutchman across and gave him a paper dollar, inquiring if he carried any other passenger when he fetched Grankin across. The man promptly answered:

"A boy. He went into the woods."

Budd mounted and took to the shadowy forest road. The journey was physically pleasant, with the timber vast and cool and still. Yet there ever was the fear he was to learn no news of the maid. It quite submerged his second worry, that he might happen upon Old Raoul. Such is human nature when lives are elemental. With the fate of the new Republic trembling in the balance, when every inside enemy must be ruthlessly suppressed, regardless of the degree of affection in which he might be held, the forest runner worried about a woman and dreaded to do his duty. Yet in his heart he knew he must go through with it even though it left him miserable for all his remaining years.

Along the very stretch he was riding Clinton's men had captured Hare and Newberry, notorious villains, and had hanged them for the atrocities they had committed at Cherry Valley. But such creatures were demons. Walter Butler was another whom Budd gladly would have hanged. But down in his heart he could not wish Old Raoul to be hanged, for he still could smell the kettle fire of Aireskoi.

Until he might happen to stumble upon scouts thrown out by Sir John and Brant, he had the forest to himself. He was interested to note the toll taken by the storms. Nearly all of the hardwood tops were stripped of their gay bonnets and were taking on the rugged masculinity of Winter. The country was undulating and offered opportunities for ambuscades. Apparently there were no traps for a lone forest runner.

Budd shifted his thoughts to Kirt and endeavored to refresh vagrant recollections of the man. He had been run out of the Mohawk Valley prior to Clinton's laborious road building march to Otsego. The coming of the Army had afforded Kirt, the runaway, an opportunity to make fat profits by catering to the soldiery. After the road was completed there were further profits in selling shelter and food to wayfarers of all sorts. But what was common knowledge at Canajoharie was seldom heard along the Schoharie.

While Budd entertained suitable regard for the warning against Kirt he could not feel any great alarm at the prospect of meeting a parcel of border scalawags, who were not brave enough to slay except by skulking murder. As an individual he had cowed seven of the Royal Greens. Surely one who had passed alive through the smoke of Aireskoi's kettle, had emerged from the Red House to live through half the night at Colliger's mansion, was not to be frightened by wayside tavern perils.

If villains were there they would be of the same type he had turned over to American riflemen. Nor was this line of reasoning based on foolish courage; it was the result of the times. With so many poor people being cruelly done to death without a chance to strike back, it behooved fighting men to be thoroughly self dependent. Doubtless some sensibilities were dulled; unquestionably many of the settlers were fatalists. They either would pull through, or would not. Why worry?

It was after midday when Budd turned a bend in the road and beheld the tavern. Its size surprised him. In-

stead of a one-story structure of logs it was a commodious two-story building. From the varied material of which it had been constructed, it was obvious that the timber had been salvaged from various partially destroyed manor houses. Some of the wide boards were charred in places, while others were punctured as if by bullets. The outside finish showed several shades of color.

Back of the house was a line of horse-hovels; and several squalid structures no better than roofed-in pens for the accommodation of the refuse of the road, including stray Indians. No attempt had been made at clearing away the growth around the house. Gaunt limbs scratched the windows on the second floor and clawed at the roof.

Two men were hurling tomahawks at a post when Budd rode up and slipped from the saddle. One of these, short and thick set, dropped his ax and came briskly forward. Before Budd could open his mouth he said crisply:

"Yes, sir. You want food and shelter, and bait for your horse. A good horse, too, or my name isn't Kirt. And you look like a young man who can pay his way."

"I always have, landlord. I may stay until sundown. I may wish to remain for several days."

"You shall have the best." Kirt whistled shrilly on two fingers and a black man came running from the rear of the building. "Take care of the gentleman's horse and feed it hay and oats," ordered Kirt.

Budd believed the oats were added for effect. He removed the saddle and carried it to the barroom while the colored hostler led the horse away. He happened to glance at the negro more closely as the man was turning the corner, and he was startled to recognize him as the escaped slave he had seen in the red camp where the Dutchman had cheated the big kettle. Whether this recognition was mutual he could only guess.

In the big taproom several roughly dressed men were throwing dice. Dropping the saddle in a corner, Budd took time to survey the gamesters, if he could style them such when they were wagering the practically worthless currency of the country. Each man gave the newcomer a quick glance. From beside the wide fireplace rose a huge dog. It slowly advanced, sniffing at the guest's legs. Similar beasts, Budd believed, were the two he had encountered on the north flank of Onistagrawa. The brute was of prodigious size and more to be feared than a panther. He made a growling noise deep in his throat, and Kirt yelled for him to lie down. Slowly, as if unwilling, the beast returned to his place by the blazing hearth and stretched out, his big head resting on his paws and his eyes staring at the scout.

One of the men quit the dice game and asked Budd if he would care to try his luck. Budd thanked him, and explained that he was saddle weary but might be glad of the diversion later in the day. The fellow returned to his mates. Kirt reappeared from the cook room and bruskly told the loungers to move their game elsewhere as dinner would be served shortly for the "gentleman". They picked up their paper stakes and shifted to a settle across the room. Budd wondered if it would be wise to inquire for Grankin, or to wait and see if he would not put in an appearance. He decided he would ask no questions as yet. If Grankin was in or about the place, he would show up to eat and the meeting would appear accidental.

THE dog finally ceased watching the newcomer; the gamesters were absorbed with their gambling; Budd was conscious of being drowsy when behind him he heard a door open and observed that the habitués of the place were much impressed by a new presence. The huge dog came to his feet and crossed the room, cringing low as if desirous of pay-

ing homage even though he should be greeted by blows. Budd's heart thumped his ribs as he wondered if it could be the Eckson maid, or her gaunt, dour faced stepfather. But he could not betray his great interest by so much as turning his head.

He heard a light step behind him—too light for Grankin—and the sound of a soft, low voice speaking to the dog. Then he did twist about and receive one of the great surprises of his life. At first he fancied it must be a figure come to life from some French print showing the mode of the court of Louis of France. He was staring, wide eyed, at Old Raoul.

But such a change in appearance! His coat was of black velvet, as were his breeches. The coat was lined with scarlet and trimmed with rich lace at the neck and wrists. The waistcoat was of scarlet, laced with gold. The buttons were of silver wire. The knee garters were of white silk, and the buckles were of gold set with brilliants, as were the buckles of his shoes. His silk stockings were clocked with gold. At his side hung a dress sword as thin and frail as a slender rapier; and the sheath and handle were agleam with what appeared to be precious stones. The jewel in his stock looked to be worth a duke's ransom, if not a king's. As he had no hat or cloak Budd assumed he had not been out of doors since his arrival.

The finery of his linen and the richness of his dress, set off by the scintillating brilliants, vastly became the thin face and the erect slim figure. He bowed punctiliously, and greeted:

"M'sieu Budd, we meet again. You must have much to tell me."

"Above all persons, M'sieu Raoul," Budd replied as he came to his feet and bowed low. "That is, if this damned dog doesn't attack me."

Old Raoul thrust the beast away and gracefully indicated the open door of the room from which he had emerged.

"We will have privacy in there. Or in my chamber at the head of the stairs. Or out in the open air."

"The room you have just quit, m'sieu. It is nearest. And I have had overmuch of the outdoors, even though the air be like wine."

Raoul ushered Budd into the room as though he were some high personage, and his punctilios did not cease until he had closed the door and they were alone. Then advancing close, his withered hand trembling on the hilt of his weapon, he demanded in a low, fierce voice—

"Why have you tracked me up the Valley of the Mohawk, asking every man and wench where I might be found?"

Now that he was decked out in so much finery Budd could not feel the same pity he would have felt had he remained the roughly clad old ginseng trader. He curtly told him—

"The commandant at Fort Hunter wishes to question you."

"So? And after I take that rough journey and spoil my ease, M'sieu Budd, the commandant at Fort Stanwix will wish to question me. And then the honorable governor at Albany would talk with me," Raoul ironically observed.

"That is not for me to decide, M'sieu Raoul," Budd answered. "I have an order from Major Wemple, directing me to conduct you to Fort Hunter. I have followed you to show you that paper."

Raoul pursed his lips and eyed the young man narrowly.

"Eh, bien!" he softly exclaimed. "That would be an order for my arrest and detention."

All Budd's stiffness, all his simulation of hauteur, fell from him. He murmured:

"Friend Raoul, certain things must be explained. I hate my errand here. But be you honest you have nothing to fear."

Raoul commenced a smile, but swiftly changed to a serious expression. He quietly asked—

"Am I believed to be a spy, working for the English king and in the pay of his Majesty?"

"I suppose it amounts to that. Perhaps not believed, but suspected. But the gist of the sorry business is for my betters to tell you," Budd sighed. "To serve this paper is the hardest task I have been asked to perform."

Old Raoul shrugged.

"*Mon dieu, M'sieu Budd!* And it will be a hard task to perform."

"At least I can make the attempt."

Budd's tone quickened because of the veiled challenge. He also found himself believing his task would be easier because of the old man's resplendent raiment.

"I alone arrested seven men at Johnstown who had been harassing a woman. I turned them over to a scout band from Fort Schuyler. I did not see them shot, but I very promptly heard the volley."

"You did that, my Joseph! It is good to hear. I would have done for the villains if time had not been of such importance. I did urge the poor woman to flee while she might. Then I had to hurry on. You can not be bought from your purpose?"

Budd's face grew hot at this suggestion. He said:

"You have known me in a way for some time. And yet, you haven't really known me at all. You showed me how to escape from the kettle. I shall always owe you for that. I can't pay you out of my own pocket. And I can't pay you out of the Republic's pocket. This is no personal matter, sir. What you can't get in the name of friendship you can't buy for all the gold in America."

Raoul smiled and whimsically said:

"One never knows what he can buy until he tries. As to gold, all of the yellow metal in America is so cunningly hidden that none of us will see much of it for a long time. I was not thinking of gold when I spoke of buying. And I should have used the term trading. I was thinking of something you treasure more than gold, possibly more than you do your loyalty."

HIS words made Budd afraid. Yet he stoutly answered that his loyalty must always come first. For a moment Raoul's face looked bleak and weary. He drew closer to the scout and whispered:

"It is no pleasure to bribe a man of your kind. It is ugly work. Nor is it a pleasure—because we have been friends—to send you to your death in this damnable trap. For that is what this place is. There is a middle course I have in mind which will serve my purpose and, perhaps, make your evasion of what you call duty much easier."

"Nothing shall do that. I must because I must. It's one of those things a man has to do."

"Of course you know you would promptly be killed if you tried to take me away from here. There is no file of American riflemen to assist you."

"It's the risk of my errand. If it's death you surely will go with me."

"Bombast, or idiocy—I believe the latter. What profit to this new America if we both die. But beyond that, what about the Eckson maid?"

Budd caught his breath and whispered:

"Aye? What about her?"

"What would you give to place her safe in Albany town? Where no red raiders, no ferocious Tories could reach her?"

"She is never here! In this house!" Budd whispered.

Old Raoul bowed his head and warned:

"Yet she is as far away from you as if separated by an ocean unless we come to terms. Her stepfather is not here. To leave her alone with these wolves would be as cruel as to turn her over to the Senecas and the kettle of Aireskoi—ah, that hurts you! She must be taken to a place of safety. I can not act her guide and protector to the Mohawk or Schoharie."

"But where is Grankin?"

Budd did not much care where the man might be, but he needed time so

that he might think.

"I do not know. I came across m'mselle below the Palatine village. In a sudden rout of a large number of refugees, running in every direction because of a false alarm, she became separated from her stepfather. She was frightened and hunting for him when she fell in with me. She has fared with me ever since."

"Damnation! She was with Grankin when he told the men from Fort Schuyler about the band near Johnstown."

"She was with *me* when *I* told the men from Schuyler about that nest of villains," Raoul quietly corrected. "Such as they serve only the devil."

"But Goshen Van Alstine, at Canajoharie, recognized Grankin from my description. He never could mistake you for him."

"I did not call on M'sieu Van Alstine or cross the ferry. Grankin may have called, but he did not have m'mselle with him."

Budd remembered that Grankin was alone when he secured his horse at Canajoharie and, also, something more. He told this to Old Raoul, and added—

"Some one was waiting for him in the edge of the woods."

"An army may have waited for him; but m'mselle did not. She was helpless with fear when I found her wildly hunting for Grankin. Knowing me well, she was glad to travel with me until she could find him. I believe he passed this way, bound for Otsego Lake."

"To Otsego Lake! In the path of old Johnson's white Senecas! In God's mercy, let me see Mistress Betsy and talk with her. I am fair bewildered."

"Not yet. I am a trader. There must be a bargain. The men here are rough creatures. They neither worship God nor fear the devil. I can not turn back and escort her to safety. I must go down the Otsego road. She will be safe with me wherever I go, but she would not like it—what she would see. On the other hand she will not go with you if that means I must go with you to Fort Hunter as a prisoner."

"You are on your way to join Brant and Johnson at Unadilla, where there are gathered the most ruthless men to be found on this continent," accused Budd.

"As evil as any to be found this side of hell," Old Raoul promptly amplified. "Yet m'mselle would be safe. But she would hear and see what she never could wash from her mind. The rites of Aireskoi. She would go mad. Do we strike a bargain?"

Without a second's hesitation Budd answered:

"If she is here, and I can take her back to the Mohawk, I will keep my paper until another time. Her safety outweighs the death of all the spies in this Republic."

"Bravo! I was beginning to fear, M'sieu Budd, that you were as fanatical as Grankin; that official ink ran in your veins instead of warm blood. Now, I must be leaving this place at sundown. I will tell m'mselle to go with whom she will, but shall warn her about the Otsego road. I will leave the dog to protect her. The two of you should not have much trouble in taking her north."

"I can look after her. That cursed brute would be a nuisance. I would have to kill him. He has sniffed and growled at my heels already."

The old man's face lighted with a thin smile, and he whimsically said:

"The beast shall be taught better manners when we leave this room. I picked him up several days before we crossed the river. He will serve m'mselle to the death. He will tolerate her friends. Take her and start back after I have departed."

"I have agreed. I must continue to agree. I will tolerate her four footed friends. But, m'sieu', you will have nothing to trade when we next meet."

"I think I understand," dryly said Raoul. "But you do ill to threaten when I can have your throat cut by snapping my fingers." Then, with his old, genial courtesy, he apologized, and added, "When this war has ended, and

we can look back and weigh it without prejudice, perhaps many of those who serve the king will be thought more kindly of. Just as you Americans always will think highly of M'sieu Nathaniel Hale, hanged for a spy. Now we will go forth and speak with M'sieu Big Dog."

He opened the door and bowed Budd into the taproom, and walked with him to the fireplace where he leaned forward and fondled the brute's head. The beast seemed to enjoy the petting immensely. Raoul told Budd to do likewise. He obeyed, with a hand on his ax, and the brute did not resent it.

Turning back to a settle, the two men sat and Raoul further explained:

"This M'sieu Kirt is a sad dog. There is no doubt as to his killing his wife in this very inn, but he fears me. And yet I can not leave full protection for you for very long once I've departed. I want you to start for the Mohawk an hour after I have left. Do not stay here overnight. When m'sieu's men get so far in their drink they become devils. They forget everything except their desires."

"Nothing shall keep me in this horrible place," Budd whispered. "Now may I see Mistress Betsy?"

"We will try," Old Raoul said, rising.

He led the way to the hall and up the stairs. He walked daintily and carried himself proudly. At the second door from the head of the stairs he halted and tapped gently. A faint voice answered him.

"It is bothersome Old Raoul," the Frenchman replied. "He brings a friend to see you, m'mselle."

"I have no friends except you, Papa Raoul, in this wretched part of the world. And did I have one, Papa Raoul, I would be ashamed to be seen."

"We must see you. It is important, m'mselle."

Budd touched his arm and whispered—

"Some one is on the stairs, listening."

Raoul cocked his head for a moment and gave a low whistle; and the big dog bounded up the flight and to his side, whining and scratching at the door.

The door opened a trifle, and the maid was standing before the scout. She looked to be all eyes, either woefully sad or frightened. She was dressed as a lad, and she made a handsome one despite the torment of her fears. With a little sob she threw her arms around Budd's neck and clung to him tightly, weeping as if her heart would break. The dog whined and attempted to crowd Budd aside.

"It is good, this greeting," gently said Old Raoul, "but she is supposed to be of our sex, M'sieu Budd. We will step inside and close the door before some one comes."

The three and the dog entered. The huge beast was jealous of the scout, but not in a vicious way. He grumbled low in his throat and whined, and crowded between the young people; then wagged his tail as if apologizing. In the waning light they sat there, while Old Raoul rapidly explained to the maid how he must be traveling into dangerous country, but that the girl had nothing to fear as Budd would escort her to a place of safety.

Now she had finished with her weeping the uppermost thought in her mind was her appearance. She insisted:

"I must have proper clothing. Some woman's gear, if it can be found. I can't dress this way any longer. I have suffered much shame. In such a big house there must be some cast-off clothing I can wear."

Raoul bowed low in sympathy, and said:

"I will look about. But I advise you not to change until you reach M'sieu Van Alstine's place at Canajoharie—too many things to explain to the men below. They are prepared to allow a boy to leave with M'sieu Budd. But—"

He did not finish. He did not need to.

"Find me a decent shift and I will go this way till we reach the Canajoharie Crossing," the girl agreed.

Raoul left them and turned down the

hallway instead of descending to the taproom. The two sat and held hands and looked at each other, their eyes making many confessions. The maid was crimson with shame, yet was weeping from happiness. Budd did not attempt to talk, fearing she might speak of Raoul and that any evasions would arouse her curiosity, or resentment. The dog groaned and whined as she wept, and eyed Budd truculently. The maid patted the big head and managed to dry her tears. She turned so Budd could see the ignominy of her shorn locks. For her hair was cut quite short.

"He made me do it. My stepfather," she whispered. "He said I would be safer as a boy."

"It was wise of him if you were to go among beasts. Your hair will grow again."

"Only the fear of something worse than death could make me be so unmaidenly," she continued, as if believing it vitally necessary to make apologies for her disguise.

Again her agitation was sensed by the dog, and the beast whined in sympathy and growled in jealous resentment. A touch of her small hand sufficed to quiet him.

In a remarkably short time Old Raoul returned with a huge armful of petticoats, lacy things and strange folderols. The Frenchman dumped the mass on the bed and said:

"I believe, m'mselle, I have guessed quite nearly what you would wear. I will get you some thread and needles, so you can make what changes you will. Then M'sieu Budd and I will go downstairs, leaving the dog here. After you have finished your gown and have tried it on you must shift back to the clothes you are now wearing. We all understand that is necessary. M'sieu I will have a horse in the hovel with yours. M'mselle rides astride very nicely."

"More to my shame," she murmured.

"Be pleased that you can, m'mselle." Raoul smiled kindly. "I shall eat an early supper and go. Kirt will understand he is not to interfere with you two when you depart. Now, M'sieu Budd, we will withdraw."

CHAPTER VIII

DEATH RIDES THE STORM

THE moment the two men had gained the taproom Budd again was impressed by the obvious fact that Old Raoul was a favored guest, and one who had the run of the hostelry. Leaving Budd by the fire, he disappeared into the cook room. When he returned he said he had given orders for their supper. Budd's gaze continually returned to dwell on Kirt with morbid interest. He never before had seen a wife murderer, and the sin was so colossal as to mix a species of awe with his abhorrence. It amazed him that the man could appear as did his fellows and that the latter could endure his presence. He was brisk and alert and had the exterior presentment of an honest landlord, with an order here and a joke there. Withal, he was entirely unlike one who carried the burden of terrible guilt.

Two squaws came in, each carrying a large tray, while a gigantic negro bore a small tray. They filed toward the stairs, and Budd held his breath as he watched them more closely. For one of the squaws was the Oneida woman, the Keeper of the False Faces; and this was thrice the two had met. The colored man mounted the stairs first, the Oneida woman bringing up the rear. As she placed a foot on the first stair she turned her head. For a moment her black eyes met Budd's, but there was not a shadow of recognition. Budd sighed in relief.

"That Oneida woman—" he murmured to Old Raoul.

And he told him how she had killed Captain Black.

The Frenchman chuckled, highly pleased, and said:

"It is good, Black brought a big

shadow upon his soul when he mistreated the Keeper of the False Faces. The gods of the red people are quick to resent insults to their people."

They waited until the table was laid in the room at the head of the stairs, the one next to that occupied by the maid. Raoul told Budd:

"I have left a big handful of gold and silver coins in plain sight. It is enough to pay for a dozen murders; but none of those three will so much as touch a piece of it."

"They would gladly cut a throat for a shilling in hard money," agreed Budd.

"Or for just the chance of finding it on a murdered man," added Raoul.

"What is your hold on them?"

"I am a witch doctor to them. They believe I can make clothes like these I am wearing by means of black magic. They are afraid lest I put a spell on them. Superstition has won almost as many battles as has the truth. Now we will go up."

"Grankin is a most morose, unhappy man," remarked Budd as they walked to the stairs.

"A strange twist of mind resulting in a religious mania. Whatever absorbs his attention is all important and becomes a part of his religion. Now to see what we have to eat. There should be meat of the deer, beef from a prime ox, a bottle of punch, fair bread and some excellent cheese."

"Could our Army have that fare they would win the war inside of six months," gloomily said Budd.

"The Army will fare none the better should we stint ourselves, so let us eat and be thankful that m'mselle need not travel on an empty stomach," said Raoul.

The dog growled ominously as he heard steps at the door. Raoul quieted him by calling out softly. Then he told the maid—

"Come into the next room, m'mselle, when you are ready."

"In a minute," she replied. "Is Joseph Budd there?"

"Here. Always near, I hope, when you need me," Budd answered.

"Youth to youth," murmured Old Raoul as he opened the door of the first room and stepped aside for Budd to enter.

Two candles were burning on the table, and Raoul lighted two more; for the shadows seemed to be gathering prematurely. The viands were not placed to the old man's liking, and he fussed with the dishes for a bit. Budd suddenly realized he was enormously hungry. It was early for candles, and yet the room would be in deep shadow without them. Branches of huge trees were scraping against the house close by the windows. Raoul stepped to a window and exclaimed aloud in disgust.

Budd joined him. Through a hole in the forest roof he saw black clouds hurrying from the west where there should have been sunshine. Budd likened it to an omen of evil for the exposed frontiers.

"Those will be red clouds, M'sieu Budd," said Old Raoul absent mindedly.

The tops of the trees were in rare agitation, and the big limbs swung back and forth with greater violence, sagging at times to claw at the house. Budd opened a window for a moment and heard the moaning that was sweeping through the ancient forest.

"Luck of the devil!" complained the old Frenchman. "What a night for my long ride, for your shorter ride. This wind will uproot the weakly anchored timber. There will be a fine snapping of roots, and a fine tumbling down of the old trees. We both run a big risk, M'sieu Budd."

"I'll outface the devil to get the maid back on the Mohawk."

A soft tap on the door silenced their moody talk. Raoul was before his companion in opening the door. As Budd bowed low, seeking to imitate some of the natural graces of the Frenchman, Betsy Eckson entered. To the masculine eye she was very delightful. She had not had time to refashion the flower be-

sprigged gown she was wearing, yet it fitted her nicely; and she was as pleasing a lass to gaze on as could be found in all America.

The dog crowded in behind her and kept close to her side. It would not leave its position even when tempted with meat.

"This gown happened to answer," she told them. "But how does it come that such a pretty frock is to be found in this desolate place."

Old Raoul suggested:

"Probably some frightened settler, fleeing north from the Old English district, and Otsego, started with more than he could carry. By the time he reached this place he began to throw away much of his luggage. Many of them would have been glad to exchange their best clothes for food."

This explanation satisfied her. Then she called attention to the bosom of the gown, where the flimsy material had been torn and stained.

"The first owner was heedless. I should prize it too highly to stain and tear it."

OLD RAOUL gave Budd a warning glance, his sharp eyes dilating. The scout did not understand. The maid said grace, and they fell to. The dog got his share. Budd was helping himself for the second time when he noticed that some of the punch had been spilled from the bottle. He was about to mention the fact and accuse the servants of sampling the liquor, when he further observed that the spilled liquid had taken on a curious shape. He examined it more closely and found it to be in the shape of a red ax. It was too exact to be the result of chance.

He complimented the maid until her cheeks took on a rare color of delighted embarrassment, and then touched Raoul's knee under the table and indicated the strange outline. The Frenchman read it in a glance, and his brows wrinkled. Then he was all merriment and frankly congratulating the two young people on being lovers, whereat Budd showed some confusion and the maid bowed her head.

She would drink none of the punch, and excused herself and left the men with the bottle. After the door closed upon her and the dog, Budd whispered—

"What in the name of the world does that ax mean?"

"Danger," whispered Raoul. "The Oneida woman believes there is danger. She left the sign. How the wind howls! Like starved devils! What a villainous night!"

"It sounds like wolves," Budd said.

"The only wolves I fear walk on two legs. My friend, I am an old man. I feel and see what, fortunately, is shut off from the young. I feel death in the air. Age often senses evil when youth feels nothing but the joy of living. It may not be for any of us three, that warning I hear in the gale. But it is for some one in this house. I felt it in the red camp when you were a prisoner. It never deceives me. Death rides the storm. I will ask you on your honor to do this. Here is a sealed paper. Keep it close. If within two weeks I do not show up to claim it, or send some word to you about it, open it and follow the simple instructions. You promise?"

"Of course. But you will show up."

"That remains to be seen. You do not regret trading your authority for m'mselle?"

"Of course not. But I warn you it applies only for this once. For tonight."

"That will be long enough. When next we meet I will try to have something else to trade for my liberty."

"None will be happier than I to find that true," Budd earnestly assured him.

The Frenchman finished his glass, then stepped behind a wardrobe. In an amazingly brief period of time he had changed back to the old slipshod Raoul whom Budd always had known. Yet he did not look as commonplace as he used to. Perhaps he had borrowed atmosphere from his rich clothing which

strengthened his personality, or else the forest runner's vision now looked deeper than the surface of things. He was very direct and business-like as he swept up his hard money, thrust a small pistol into a pocket and belted on his knife and tomahawk. From a bag of sailcloth he produced a long black cloak and black hat. When he was thus dressed Budd's eyes popped wide, and he exclaimed—

"You're Grankin for all the world!"

"Just my travel rig. Everything is paid for. They believe I am returning soon. I will go down the back way to mount and ride. Do not wait for the sunset hour. It will grow dark early. Cut the hour's wait in half. *Bon voyage.*"

"A moment. You sent riflemen to Johnson Hall?"

"I have said it. Must I come in on belts? It was to save poor, defenseless people. Take the dog with you."

Old Raoul was through the door and had closed it before Budd could as much as wish him good faring. After he had been gone five minutes the girl returned. She had not changed to her boy's dress, and Budd was worried. When he reminded her of the attention she was sure to receive, arriving as a boy and departing a beautiful maiden, she ignored the compliment.

"It's the storm that gave me the notion. I will wrap up in my cloak and wear my ragged hat. We will be outdoors and away, with none the wiser."

The wind was increasing in ferocity, and the big dog walked the floor and howled mournfully. With fright in her dark eyes the maid said:

"They sometimes howl for those about to die. Where is Raoul?"

Budd explained, and she wept silently for a bit.

"And with never a goodby for me."

"He left a thousand. He planned our going and his going. I had to agree. I know it would have been hard for him to have said goodby to you."

"I would we could leave now," she urged.

"In half an hour; and we'll favor ourselves in deciding when the thirty minutes are up," Budd told her. "Better the night and the storm than to be longer in this damnable place."

They were one in that thought. Betsy announced:

"I shall take the dog with me. You will come, Brother of the Big Teeth?"

He answered by rubbing his head against her knees.

"Old Raoul said for you to take him," said Budd.

They were startled by a heavy crash. The noise resounded even above the fury of the storm. They stepped to the window to witness the tragedy of the elements, and were in time to behold an ancient tree caught by the claws of the gale. In a trice it was ripped from its century-old moorings, and in toppling took a heavy toll of the lesser growth. Much as when the mighty among mortals fall from their high seats they crush lesser people beneath them.

"Something of a windstorm," said Budd in an effort to belittle the violence of the tempest.

"A fearful storm!" corrected the maid. "The forest must be filled with fallen timber."

The rain, like wet whiplashes, slashed the window. The maid pressed close against Budd as they peered into the dusk and saw something of the havoc.

"That big tree that went down might have crushed us! I am afraid of the wind."

"Nonsense. It's nothing but a blustering bully," he assured her. The real fear in his heart was occasioned by the lawless men downstairs. His great dread was that they might discover his companion's sex. The red ax drawn in punch by the Oneida woman should be sufficient warning. That the inmates of the tavern were as ruthless as old Satan himself had been proven in each of their ferocious histories. Kirt, the wife murderer, was a fit leader. Budd preferred the dangers of the tempest.

The dog whined and crowded against the scout. It was the first time the brute

had given him any voluntary attention. Like the maid he feared the shrieking of the wind. To Budd it recalled a frontier cabin, when as a little boy he had heard the howling of a wolf pack on a Winter's night.

"Now shall we go?" he asked the maid when he deemed a full half hour had elapsed.

His strange unrest bordered dangerously on panic.

"In a few minutes. Perhaps it will lessen. Hear it breaking the timber! A giant snapping twigs!"

BUDD did not need to be told of the almost irresistible power of the storm; or of the peril to those who risked their lives in traveling up the Clinton road. High good fortune need be with him who would run that terrible gauntlet. To take Betsy's mind off the storm he inquired about her stepfather.

"I have no idea where he is tonight. Just before we were separated by a false Indian scare on the Mohawk he read much in the Old Testament, and told me he had a mission. I know nothing of where he went, or why. I do not even know if we were separated by accident. I have doubted it."

"It must have been an accident," said Budd; but he believed the contrary.

The increasing dread of the sinister house now overwhelmed all fears of the storm. He bruskly announced—

"Now we must go."

The girl must have read something of her companion's vague dread. She seized the fringed shoulders of his hunting shirt and stared up into his face with an intensity that bothered him. Then she went limp and bowed her head.

"Yes, Joseph. Now we will go. No matter what happens, we will go together."

"You simple child! Would we wander the forest apart?" His lightness of tone was as false as the ocean of worthless paper inundating and spoiling the land.

"I mean together, let the road lead where it will. In life and death, together."

"Life is ours!" Budd cried. "Why speak of death? There is no danger to hurt us."

As if protesting, the big dog howled weirdly.

"Nothing can harm us which does not separate us," the girl bravely replied. In the candlelight her eyes seemed more serene.

Budd told her:

"You are safe here with the dog. I'll step below and see how the land lies. I'll be back very soon."

She did not relish the parting. One small hand unconsciously gripped the dog by the scruff of the neck. The big beast, as sleek of coat as a panther, crowded against her, his eyes shining with red fires in the flickering light. She nodded for him to go, her pale lips twisted into what was meant for a smile. She cautioned—

"Do not be long."

He descended the stairs and found the gamblers had abandoned their gaming and were watching the streaming windows as if expecting to see their master, the devil, appear.

"No such blow did I ever see before in all my mortal years out here," said an old man. "It's a sign of somethin'."

"Keep your trap shet, you old fool!" grumbled another. "If there be a big blowdown every time there is something to happen, then there wouldn't be nary a tree left in all North Ameriky by now."

"I didn't mean battles an' sich-like," insisted the ancient. "Something what strikes mortal hard near this place."

These superstitions interested Budd none, except to prove the storm might be a blessing instead of a hindrance. There would be some risk of being crushed by falling timber; but that was a clean death. No heed was given him. He was under the protection of old Raoul's name. What the trader's standing was among these scoundrels, before whom he elected to parade in the ex-

quisite dress of a marquis, was beyond Budd's guessing.

Budd walked slowly toward the stairs after reconnoitering to his fill. His foot was on the first rise, when he was turned to a rigid image by a fearful yell on the floor above. It was like nothing human. Then there erupted into view at the head of the stairs the figure of Kirt, the landlord. His appearance was that of one gone mad. Insanity was in his bulging eyes. His mouth was loosely gaping. He seemed to see nothing of earth, but as if he were staring into the hell of Satan's awful triumph. He wheeled at the stop of the stairs to glare at what might be behind him; and Budd beheld Betsy Eckson.

From a man standing behind Budd came the screamed announcement:

"Th' storm's fetched her back! She died in a storm like this! She rides back on one! Kirt's woman! Wearin' th' gown she wore when he knifed her on that stormy night! God help us who ain't killed the helpless!"

To the accompaniment of this fearful speech Kirt collapsed and rolled down the stairs, completing the last few steps with the inertia of a half filled bag of meal. Budd knew the craven beast believed he had met the ghost of his murdered wife near the very spot where he had killed her.

The dog started to follow his master, but dropped on his haunches at the head of the stairs and lifted his head and howled his salute to death. The maid stepped back and vanished. Budd mounted the stairway in three leaps, hurdling the form of the murderer. He fairly hurled himself into the supper chamber, to find the Eckson maid inert on the floor.

He carried her to her room, where he bathed her forehead with punch and fed a spoonful of it between her pale lips. She choked and sat up, her eyes wild with nameless horror. After a few moments she recalled what had happened.

"Where is he? That terrible one? He said I was his wife! He said he had killed me!"

"He is dead, I trust. He looked dead when he finished tumbling down the stairs. Shift back to your boy's clothes and we'll get clear of this accursed place."

The thought of leaving, even if to seek refuge in the storm, aroused her to frantic action. Budd told her:

"I'm going below again for a few minutes. Be ready when I come back. The dog will keep you brave company."

"He howled for death. Kirt is dead," she said.

"Better the luck for us," he assured her.

He ran down the stairs and found the landlord's crumpled form where it had ceased its clumsy, grotesque rolling. The position of the body had changed none. In passing Budd paused and felt of the neck. It was broken. Even then he was not sure whether it was the fall, or fright, that had killed the man. The taproom was empty. He pressed on to the kitchen and found but one human being there, the Oneida woman.

"Where are the men?" he asked.

She was crouching in a corner with a blanket hooding her head.

"The men run away," she told him. "The man on the stairs has traveled very far."

"To the land of ghosts," Budd added. "The ax you left on the table told there was danger."

"He saw his dead squaw," she muttered. She lifted her head and glanced out the darkened window. She shivered as she said, "You must go away quick."

The wind blew the ashes from the deep fireplace. Budd could feel the building rock. Not being superstitious, he said:

"This is a good place now. The men have gone away. We will stay here till a new sun comes."

"Go, go," she mumbled; and she pulled the blanket more snugly about her as if feeling the chill of Winter. "The Keeper of the False Faces sees death coming again to this long house.

This time it will hunt down the young friend of Ha-no-da-ga-ne-ars."

The last was the Iroquois name for Washington and could be translated as "Town-destroyer", the Iroquois holding him responsible for the destruction of the Seneca villages by the Sullivan expedition.

The warning did not impress Budd. If the men had fled the place he and the girl could remain until the morrow, and travel in safety. The woman lifted her head and gestured for him to listen. He heard nothing.

"The white man has no ears," she said. "The Keeper of the False Faces hears the sound of horses riding to this house. They bring death."

He did not believe the woman had heard any sounds above the howling of the wind. He would not concede that her hearing was better than his. He cut off several thick slices of roast beef, remembered to take a bone for the dog, and started to return to the Eckson maid. The Oneida woman came to her feet and walked beside him, and again insisted that he leave before it was too late. She whispered that the Ha-ne-go-ate-geh—evil spirits—were spying on the house. At the foot of the stairs she halted and stared at Kirt for a moment, then muffled her head in her blanket and ran out into the storm.

THE emptiness of the house depressed Budd. He had longed to be rid of the riotous company, and now that he had his wish he was suddenly tempted to take his luck in the storm and darkness. He was ashamed of this weakness and attributed it to the ominous warning of the Oneida woman. A nameless fear walked with him up the stairs and yet he renewed his determination to remain in shelter until daybreak.

Betsy Eckson had changed to her boy's clothes. Budd saw no sign of the gay gown, nor did he ask her what she had done with it. She was frantically striving to open the window. The dog stood beside her, his paws on the sill. The beast gave no heed to the bone Budd dropped on the floor, and the scout knew it was useless to offer food to the maid. He inquired—

"Are you planning to fly, or fall?"

"Two big branches, one above the other, hang close to this window," she answered. "If we could walk along the lower and cling to the other we could reach the tree and gain the ground."

Budd took her place and succeeded in raising the window. The tree limbs were close to the sill. As the girl had discovered, they suggested a new avenue of escape did the need arise.

"You must rest," he said. "I will stand guard in the hall. The dog shall stay with you."

"I am mortally afraid, Joseph Budd. Something is coming; something terrible."

Her eyes were round with the horror of it all. Her tense fear, joined with the Oneida woman's warning, disturbed him.

"What can be coming, sweetheart, that you could hear?" he scoffed. "Even if an army were approaching with drums and cannon, you could not hear it."

"I *feel* it coming," she whispered. Then in a shrill staccato she cried, "Hark! What's that?"

"The wind slamming the front door shut," he soothed.

"And that? Is that the wind?" she whispered. She gripped his arm with both small hands and advanced her terror distorted face close to his.

He heard voices in the taproom below. Then one deep voice shouted:

"Stable the horses, you damn fool! Rain and wind can't hurt you." The voice rose above the roar of the storm again. "Where are you all? Kirt! Are you drunk, or just asleep?"

The dog growled ominously and bristled. Budd told the girl he would investigate. At the head of the stairs, with the taproom candles lighting the lower half of the flight, he reconnoitered. One of the newcomers was standing like

a wooden image. He had caught up a silver candlestick from the long table and was holding it above his head as he stared at the figure of Kirt. Suddenly he yelled. The pack rushed to investigate; and all became silent as they gaped at the sprawling body.

The leader roughly forced his way through the press. His wig was dishevveled by the storm. He had lost his hat. He wore a sword and his fingers closed around it as if to draw. The candle was advanced, and Budd recognized the man as Colliger.

"What's the matter with him, Cap'n?" asked a frightened follower.

"What's the matter with the whole cursed place?" was the fierce reply. "Yank him down here. The fool must be drunk."

Hands reached upward and dragged the inanimate figure to the floor. A man with the white beard of a patriarch made a brief examination.

"Dead," he reported. "Neck's snapped."

"The fool disobeyed orders," said Colliger. "Got drunk and fell downstairs."

Budd felt he would give the rest of his life were the Eckson maid out of the house and safely on her way to the Canajoharie Crossing.

"His face is frozen as if he had seen the devil," said a man.

"Cart him away! He betrayed his trust by getting drunk at this, of all times," said Colliger. "But where the devil are the rest of the men? Some of you cook a kettle. I'll soon be back."

With this order he stepped over the dead man and mounted the stairs.

Budd noiselessly gained Betsy's room and softly shot the bolt. Her hands clutched his arm. She had opened the window and the wind was swirling the rain far inside the room. She drew him to the sill. Two limbs of an oak were rasping and threshing against the side of the house, one above the other. Without any hesitation she threw a leg over the sill, leaned perilously out and seized the uppermost limb and swung in mid-air, feeling for the swaying perch below with her moccasined feet.

Budd watched her slim figure, unable to help her. The dog reared up beside him and howled as if for the dead. The beast would have leaped out into the night had not Budd held it back. The girl swung wildly, buffeted by the gale and pelted by the rain, but at last her feet found the treacherous support and she worked her way toward the gnarled trunk. At moments the lower branch escaped her small feet, and Budd, helpless, held his breath as she dangled and swayed until the limb returned within reach. Again the dog howled, and Budd's heart almost collapsed as one hand lost its grip. Then she regained her hold.

A heavy blow on the door behind Budd caused him to whirl about. He had no time to await the outcome of the girl's dangerous faring until he had dealt with the menace beyond the door. The barrier shook under the impact of a heavy body. Then it crashed in, and Colliger stood on the threshold, sword in one hand and a pistol in the other. He cried—

"Who are you in here?"

Behind him on the hall floor was the candle. As he moved aside the light was sufficient for him to recognize the scout. With a tremendous roar as a preface, he triumphantly cried:

"God, what luck! Bagged the fire-setter, thief and sneak!"

With that he snapped the pistol, but the storm had spoiled the priming. Hurling it at Budd's head, he sought to pin him to the wall with his sword. Budd leaped aside and would have thrown his ax had not the dog, like a black bolt, leaped and caught Colliger by the throat. He went down, with the dog worrying him to death. Budd leaned from the window and dropped his rifle. The men downstairs were calling for Colliger. Budd dragged the dog from the still form and pointed down the hall and told him to go. The animal disappeared like a streak as those below came swarming

up the stairway. Budd heard their oaths and yells of fear as the black beast met them on the stairs and bowled his way through the group.

Then the scout was outside the window and rapidly swinging hand over hand into the trunk of the tree. The noise of the wind would have drowned his voice did he call out to Betsy. As he slid down the trunk, falling the last few feet, he felt her small hands gripping his arm; and the dog jealously crowded between them. Without attempting speech, the scout recovered his rifle and led the way to the first horse-hovel. One man was on guard there. His voice was craven as he called out—

"That you, Cap'n?"

Budd struck at him with his ax, but the blow fell short because of the darkness. Then the black thunderbolt was at the man, and the scout was glad the wind drowned the sounds that followed. Budd's saddle was in the taproom, but others were hanging from pegs, as his groping fingers soon discovered. To the accompaniment of the wind and the hissing swirl of the rain, he managed to saddle two animals.

Once in the road the horses picked their way intelligently and moved cautiously when coming to a barricade of fallen timber. The darkness was intense and the animals could not see well enough to bolt.

Often it was necessary for Budd to dismount and find a roundabout path. But if their progress was slow they had the satisfaction of knowing the pursuit, if any, could make no faster time. Nor did the scout fear a chase. The death of Colliger and the horse guard, and the nature of their wounds, would foster the belief that Satan rode the storm and was collecting tribute.

Thus they fared until morning, when the storm blew itself out and they were close to the Canajoharie Crossing, and the Eckson maid was lying asleep in Budd's arms, her weary mount trailing behind, the huge dog trotting jealously at the stirrup.

CHAPTER IX

BIG HENRY SPRINGS HIS TRAP

THROUGHOUT the journey down the Mohawk, Budd and Betsy Eckson ever were in sight of panic stricken fugitives. Many of these poor frightened creatures would be content with no shelter closer to the frontier than Albany. When they talked they spoke of the impending red raid as being more devastating than anything a frontier people ever had experienced. Governor Clinton was beseeched to send reenforcements to all outlying settlements. Similar petitions were sent to General Washington. That great leader, staggered by the terrible treachery of Arnold, knew the war must be won in front of British regulars and not by bushfighting.

When Budd and his companion halted at Fort Hunter, the scout was immensely relieved to learn Wemple was absent. As he had no orders to file complete reports with a subordinate, he contented himself with relating what he had learned about Sir John and his plans. When they reached the Corbus Kill the maid, still attired as a boy, told him—

"I shall never forget you, Joseph Budd."

"I'll see to it that you never do," the scout joyously assured her. "I'll look for a parson once old Johnson is driven back into Canada."

With the threat of frosts on still nights, the air was as invigorating as wine. The horizons were tinged with that almost impalpable haze that seems to spread stillness over the land, and permits the sound of dropping acorns to be heard at a considerable distance. The wind had stripped much of the foliage from the hardwoods, but each tree unstripped was a war torch.

The garrison at the Middle Fort poured forth to greet them and Tim Murphy's rich brogue delighted the refugees and sadly embarrassed the young couple. When he asked Budd to

tell him the date of the wedding, the scout's face rivaled the most brilliant maples. For one so demure Mistress Betsy should have been greatly confused. To Budd's amazement all badinage brought only smiles to her usually sober countenance.

Now, surely, one might have believed Budd had earned a few days of rest. Yet on the first day after his return he was ordered out by Wolsey to scout west a few miles to learn if the enemy were that near. Murphy already had brought in the news that the red and white army had come up the Charlotte and had camped at Summit Lake. It was taken for granted that the foe would be on the Schoharie within a few days.

"Be careful, Joseph Budd," said the girl in parting. "I shall be standing here when you return."

Later, he learned, she sent the dog to accompany him; but the brute, for love of her, showed rare judgment by returning to be scolded.

Budd visited his cabin. It had not been disturbed that he could see. He climbed a tall tree and studied the western horizon. He thought he saw a smoke, but could not be sure. He scouted through the small opening between his and the Grankin cabin, and paused a moment to admire the bronze ferns and bushgrowth on a hillock. Colloquially it was known as Ghost Hill, because of a legendary Indian murder there in one of the old French and Indian wars. He advanced two miles beyond this hillock and then south for three miles toward Onistagrawa, and returned by a northeasterly course. The peace of a perfect day was on the world, and he had neither seen nor heard a human being.

As he passed through the half naked woods he endeavored to determine just what route Sir John's mixed forces would follow. He decided the first blow would be struck at the Lower Fort to prevent fugitives from descending the river and gaining the north bank of the Mohawk or scattering to Schenectady.

He believed that Sir John's major objective was to destroy the rich harvest, so sadly needed by the American Army. This belief relieved his concern about ambushes, and he took time to visit the Grankin cabin. He found the place as he had last seen it, except that the latchstring was out. He entered and closed the door. Everything was in order. He took time to note certain improvements Grankin had made. He had laid what, for a frontier cabin, was an excellent floor. A trapdoor in this indicated he had bothered to dig a root cellar. This had been done, Budd decided, with thought for the future as there was no ground under cultivation near the cabin.

One end of the room was curtained off by blankets. This was the girl's chamber. As he turned to depart, the scout's gaze again wandered to the trapdoor. It had no ring for raising; no hinges were visible. Unless one looked closely it would not be observed. Then he recalled that he had seen none of the excavated soil outside the cabin.

Curiosity in a borderman is sometimes a prime virtue. Budd inserted the point of his hunting knife and lifted the trap. There were no hinges. The cellar was covered as one covers a kettle. He thrust his head through the opening to observe how large an excavation had been made. He could not estimate the capacity of the hole as, with the exception of a space large enough to accommodate a man, it was filled with tiers of smoked hams. Grankin kept no hogs. A closer examination turned Budd's surprise to fear. The hams were of different colors. They had been smoked at different times by different people. There was a similar stock of provisions in the Red House.

Budd was startled by the sound of voices. He knelt at a loophole and was astounded to behold Grankin and Big Henry approaching. He dropped into the cellar, cocked his rifle and adjusted the covering. Horrible thoughts were racing through his head as a heavy step

and a light step announced the entrance of the two men.

Big Henry was the first to speak. He asked—

"Where is the woman?"

"We got separated up the valley," said Grankin. "I lost her in a crowd of crazy people just beyond the Palatine settlement. She must have returned to Fort Hunter, or gone to Schenectady. I did not hunt for her. I was in a hurry and she was a bother."

"My brother is a wise man. Let some man take her as his squaw. You will be here to give us the meat?"

"The meat is under the floor. It may not be safe for me to stay here. Some of the wild Senecas, who do not know me, might kill me."

"My brother will leave a sign on the door. It will tell all the Iroquois that a friend of the Long House lives here."

"I am more scared of the blue eyed Senecas," said Grankin.

"My sign will tell all men of the Long House to hang white wampum around your neck. If you go to the fort you might get killed."

"I've done my part. I should be in Schenectady," said Grankin.

"You will be here when Sir John comes." The breed spoke as one having authority.

"I will be here. Will you eat?"

"I have work to do first. If my *orenda* is strong I will feed the head of a white man to my new club."

"Joseph Budd—I don't yet know how he escaped from Brant's camp. He may be on the Mohawk. I heard several times he was hunting for me and the girl. To think I thought him stupid and for that reason recommended him to the Albany Committee of Safety! He burned Colliger's house and destroyed half a million dollars in bogus currency. Curse him!"

"If my *orenda* is strong it will send him hunting for me. He will walk into a trap if he goes to his cabin. A trap on what white men call Ghost Hill."

"Kill him by all means. Had I been on the East Branch when he was a prisoner, he never would have gone free. Put your mark on the door. We'll be going. I must go to Fort Hunter."

"There is time. My father was a white man. I have white notions. I have been to school. I talk as well as you or Budd does. Why shouldn't I marry a white woman?"

"No reason. But mark the door."

"Why shouldn't I marry Betsy Eckson?"

"No reason, if you can find her and make her take you."

"If we get her in the raid she will beg me on her knees to marry her."

"I have no interest in her. We will go."

BUDD felt weak and sick almost to nausea as he realized the fearfulness of Grankin's true nature. The door opened and by the sounds Budd knew Big Henry was making a mark of protection on it. Because of the perfidy of the infamous traitor Budd continued in hiding, too weak and sick of soul to emerge. When he crawled forth and carefully restored the covering, both men had vanished from the little clearing. The latchstring was out, indicating Grankin purposed an early return. On opening the door Budd found the symbol of the Wolf Clan, drawn by means of red war paint. With hunting knife and ax Budd slivered this over, and then took to the woods.

He was astounded and horrified by his discovery. He was woefully perplexed as to what he should do with the traitor should both survive the raid. The maid's mother had been the man's wife. Although the monster entertained no affection for his stepdaughter, Budd did not want to place a bloody memory between himself and the maid by acting the executioner. The girl had no suspicion that Grankin was a traitor. Knowledge of the fact would embitter her life.

Big Henry, however, was an entirely different piece of business. That he should thirst for the scout's life was

a purely personal matter between them. His threats and boasts concerning the girl were monstrous. Budd was determined to find him and close his trail for all time. The only course he could devise in Grankin's case was to find him and warn him to leave the country at once with the knowledge that Tim Murphy would be let into the secret and set on his trail.

A trap. And on Ghost Hill. He conjured up a picture of the hillock as he had observed it that day. There was the stump of an ancient tree and a fringe of sapling growth. Such cover was too slight to afford concealment. The scout could not imagine the nature of the trap unless the breed lay in ambush behind the stump. He hurried through the timber until he came to the little opening. Then he began circling the hillock without leaving cover. He returned to the starting point without having discovered his quarry.

The light was failing. He emerged from the growth and advanced on the hillock. Smoke spouted from the side of the stump, accompanied by the booming report of a musket, and Budd heard the whine of a heavy ball close to his head. He came to a plunging halt, and for a moment was completely nonplused by the simplicity of it.

Then he shouted triumphantly:

"A hollow stump! The dog's in it! Damn you, Henry, I'm fetching you your come-uppance!"

He threw up his rifle and drilled a hole through the decayed wood.

Like a jack-in-the-box the breed popped out of his hiding place, and with a whoop bounded down the slope, a pistol and an ax in his hands. This boldness was easily understood. He believed the rifle to be empty. Budd switched the lower barrel into place and began laughing.

Big Henry slowed his advance, quick to suspect some trick.

"You have friends in the woods behind you, Joseph Budd," he said.

"I'm alone, Henry. I'm about to kill you for several reasons. One is that you would marry a white woman."

The breed leaped forward, sounding his wild cry, his pistol raised, his ax ready for a blow or a cast. Budd threw up his rifle and shot him in the forehead.

He took time to investigate the hollow stump. The opening had been enlarged by the careful removal of decayed wood. Two men could easily crouch within it. There were three loopholes through the thin bark.

His investigations abruptly ended when he heard a faint cry in the south. The gunshots had carried far. A red scout was seeking an explanation. The cry was answered in the west. Budd started to run for the Middle Fort. The heavens were afire with stars when he arrived at the picket fence, where Betsy Eckson and the big dog were waiting for him.

"You've been running long and hard," she whispered. "You've been in danger."

"I've been mortal keen to find you waiting here," he explained.

CHAPTER X

THE STORM

MAJOR WOLSEY frowned as he listened to Budd's report, and bluntly told the young man he was grossly mistaken. He was convinced no Indians were nearer than the Charlotte River, and that there was nothing to indicate the hostile force planned to strike the valley.

Budd took his departure, pausing only to bid Betsy Eckson good night and tell her of Wolsey's attitude. He concluded by saying, "None so dangerous as a fool." He was wrathful as he walked from the stone house and met Tim Murphy. The Irishman's homely face was widened by a sardonic grin.

"Almost as good as callin' yez a liar," said the famous scout, with a chuckle. "Niver mind him a bit. It's not th' likes of him that'll save th' Schoharie from th'

red divils. He won't sing that tune when auld Johnson an' his red naggers hit our valley."

"Tim, I'll tell you what I won't tell Wolsey," Budd whispered. And he related his encounter with Big Henry on Ghost Hill. But he made no mention of Grankin. Murphy gave him high praise, but became profanely eloquent when he learned his young friend had not removed the breed's scalp.

The two were still talking under the stars when Wolsey and almost all of the garrison came from the house and temporary quarters and stared at the western and southern horizons. Wolsey began—

"Sir John Johnson will not waste his strength in attacking this post when richer prizes await him."

None gave him answer, but there was much nudging. A low groan came from Murphy.

"All this scare talk," continued Wolsey, now working up to a heat, "is very bad. This valley doesn't approve of reports intended to frighten. This valley—"

A woman's thin cry interrupted him, and he turned convulsively.

"There can't be two moons!" the woman shrilly protested. "Look! To the south!"

Others saw it, the most fearful phenomenon border people could view—the glowing of a red patch above the forest and in the direction of the Upper Fort. Imagination could supply the vicious crackling of the incendiary flames and the wailing of women and the cries of children.

"God! They've fetched the ax a'ready!" bellowed a settler. "They've started their burnings!"

Fascinated by the sinister omen, all watched it reach its apogee and commence to dwindle.

"It must be a little cabin," whispered a woman.

"Th' divils be burnin' all th' outlyin' homes!" cried Tim Murphy. "God give th' poor people be safe in th' fort!"

All were quick to observe other red flowers blooming at different points, and husky voices whispered the names of those who were losing their cabins, if not their lives. With the Eckson maid gripping his hand, Budd stared at the evil burgeoning and, spellbound, watched the lurid patches of red reach full growth and then fade away. The scout was glad he had told none his mistaken theory of the Lower Fort being the enemy's first objective.

Throughout the hours of darkness the rosy glow appeared again and again, and obviously was drawing closer. Also the dull reports of the fort's signal guns reached the ears of the watchers. Colonel Vroman announced:

"The guns sound good. The fort holds out."

"There goes Heckler's grain!" cried a farmer.

A rich harvest of grain and hay burned that night while the Middle Fort watched. Budd was infuriated by Wolsey's inaction. It was not until the gray of the morning that he would permit a scout band to reconnoiter. Then he did send Lieutenant Spencer with a detachment of militia, with Budd and other valley men scouting ahead. The latter were soon driven back, but did not lose a man. The detachment retired inside the fence in good order. Murphy reported the enemy force to consist of three companies of Royal Greens, a company of Hessian Jägers, two hundred of Butler's Rangers and one company of British regulars. Of the number of Indians he could make no estimate. These hung in a red circle about the fort, looting and burning.

Sir John Johnson sent a flag with a summons to surrender.

"Receive the flag," ordered the frightened commander.

"Receive th' divil!" snorted Murphy.

He threw up his famous rifle and, contrary to all military etiquette but entirely in accord with the garrison's wishes, sent a bullet close to the man's head, causing him to fall back in haste.

Lieutenant Spencer and his men were highly scandalized. Major Wolsey was furious with rage and berated Murphy. The latter grinned good naturedly and reloaded the empty barrel. When the commandant had talked himself out, Murphy replied:

"Th' red divils will kill 'n' scalp all of us if we give in. They'll break ivery promise they make, an' auld Johnson can't stop thim. We'll die fightin', mebbe, but we don't surrinder. Yez better run to th' stone house, Major, dear."

The besieged had but little ammunition. The enemy were amply supplied, yet they did no damage beyond burning empty cabins and firing stacked grain. The big dog kept close to the Eckson maid, growling deep in his throat. Once he left her and brushed outside like a black thunderbolt and drove two Indians from behind a pile of fence rails, and received no hurt although the warriors struck at him with axes. The maid whistled him back, and one of the savages stood and raised his gun. David Elerson, Murphy's companion in many a bit of bush running, shot the red man off his feet. As the siege continued Murphy fell to laughing until the tears rolled down his brown cheeks.

"Be you mad, fool?" cried the terrified Wolsey.

"It's to laugh at, Major, dear," explained the Irishman. "Here's a fort yez want to surrinder an' can't. There's th' inimy that wants to talk it over with us, an' can't. They can't catch us an' we can't surrinder, an' th' divil's to pay."

As he ceased speaking a second flag approached. Murphy promptly turned it back with a bullet. Wolsey raved and ordered him to desist. The Irishman told him he was a "damned coward". Some of the soldiers threatened the rifleman with death if he fired again. Budd stood beside the famous scout when he fired on the third flag. The militia cheered him roundly. The regulars did not offer to make good their threat.

Before the garrison could realize it, Sir John was retiring and hurrying on down the valley, burning houses and grain, and killing those stragglers who were late in starting for the fort. He was repulsed at the Lower Fort by grapeshot and musket balls fired from the tower of the Dutch Reformed Church. Wolsey surrendered his command to Colonel Vroman, who promptly led a scout band after the enemy and harassed them until they entered the Fort Hunter district. No house, barn, or grain stack owned by a Whig was spared. Tory property was not touched; but after Sir John entered the Mohawk Valley the Whigs burned all such. A hundred thousand bushels of grain were destroyed between the Lower Fort and Hunter. Caughnawaga was burned. Every dwelling on both sides of the Mohawk was destroyed as far as Fort Plain.

BETSY ECKSON was afraid to have Budd enter the woods. He made direct for the Grankin cabin. The place was in ashes and Grankin was dead in the ruins, having perished by fire. As the scout stood and brooded over the part he had played in the man's destruction, he heard a slight noise behind him. He spun about with cocked gun. Raoul, dressed as shabbily as of old, stood bowing before him. He greeted:

"*Bon jour, M'sieu Budd.* I have seen in the ashes what you have seen. He was faithful to Sir John, and a traitor to America. And yet they killed him. I do not understand."

"There was a protection mark on his cabin door, M'sieu Raoul. I removed it."

Forthwith Budd recounted the conversation between Grankin and Big Henry, and told of the latter's death.

"You did well, M'sieu Budd," said the old man gravely. "It was the best day's work you ever did for these United States when you removed the sign of the Wolf Clan of the Mohawks."

"Yet it is horrible, because of the maid. She must never know."

"She will not know. But the traitor

would have sacrificed her as quick as he would snap his fingers. He was the owner of the Red House. He collected meat and powder for Johnson's army. He made signals from Onistagrawa to Colliger. When he was away he had a farmhand stay there and take the signals. Kirt's place was another of his stations. He did big work for Sir John. He was as merciless as a tiger. And yet —and it hurts a bit—people will and must believe that he died a patriot. For the sake of m'mselle."

"It is the only way," agreed Budd. "But, M'sieu Raoul, I still have a paper calling for your arrest and appearance at Fort Hunter. I have seen you wherever I have seen Grankin. You were as safe with Sir John's forces as was Grankin."

"That is true, my young friend," gravely admitted the Frenchman. "I come here to tell about myself, and to ask for that paper I gave you. Your hand goes to the breast of your hunting shirt. You have kept it with you. Open it and read, and then forget you ever read it."

Budd drew forth the paper and broke the seal. It was written and signed by Governor Clinton and was addressed to all officers the bearer might come in contact with in the guise of a captured enemy spy. His Excellency vouched for the patriotism of the Frenchman, and indorsed his work as being of great value and warned all commanders to keep his secret.

"You are Clinton's spy!" gasped Budd.

"But yes. What would you have? I am an American. Three men know my real purpose now. You, his Excellency and myself. There are many men and women now alive who will take with them to their graves the firm belief that I was an enemy in heart and act. Sir John still believes I am working for his royal master. There can be no praise, no reward for me. It was something some one had to do. I have known for some time that Grankin was Sir John's man. Now that he's dead from red ax and fire he will be remembered as a patriot. My work must go on. I have much to do."

The big dog came bounding through the growth. He barked a refusal when Budd called him and kept on his way. When he did return he brought with him the Oneida squaw, whose face was swollen and blood stained from a heavy blow. Whether instinct or chance led the dog to the former Keeper of the False Faces, Betsy and Budd never could agree. They gave the poor creature a home, it being understood that she was to help about their small house.

But beyond making hideous false faces for the Budd children to use in frightening each other, and relating to them wondrous stories of the days when the roof of the Long House covered the colony from the New Hampshire Grants to the Niagara country, she worked none.

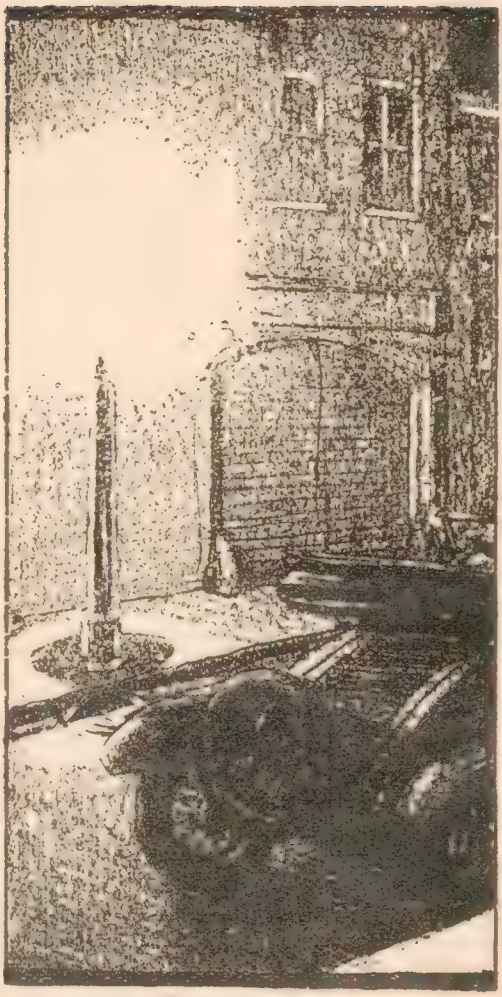
And thus they wooed and fought and married and raised their families, and held the frontiers, until the day came when it was safe for a child to walk in the forest in the moon of budding leaves and during the colorful glory of the Indian Summer.

THE END

A Novelette of the Underworld

By

WILLIAM CORCORAN



An ALIBI

THE hall light in the entry of the small apartment house at King and Maple was dimmed every evening at eleven. It was eleven-thirty when John Deker sauntered into the foyer and thrust his key into the lock. In the darkness the man standing in one corner of the wide entryway was not immediately visible. He made known his presence by addressing Deker.

"That you, John?" he said softly. "This is Danny."

Deker, at first sound of the voice, made a move as instinctive as it was swift, leaving the key in the lock and sidestepping from the door. Then he paused, stared into the darkness, and replied casually:

"Oh, hello, Danny. Waiting for me?"

"Yeah. I didn't know where to look for you especially, and I had to see you tonight."

Danny Shane emerged from the dark corner. He was a small, wiry man with a quick and pleasant voice in which there was a note of anxiety. Deker saw the hand that was thrust out to him and he gave it a short, strong grip.

"Glad I came along. Come upstairs and we'll talk it over," he invited cordially. "How've you been and how's the family? I haven't seen much of you around."

"Been tied up. Working, and all. Things is tough."

They proceeded upstairs and entered

for BLOOD

another door on the second landing. Deker switched on the light in the large, comfortably furnished living room, and went into the bedroom adjoining. He placed his hat on a closet shelf and hooked his walking stick on a bar attached to the closet door. There were five other canes on the bar.

Shane was standing by the mantelpiece lighting a cigaret when Deker returned. He swung about quickly. Deker was watching him.

"What's the matter, Danny?" he inquired. "You seem upset. The folks haven't quit patronizing the Shane taxi fleet these days, have they?"

He walked across the room, and in one corner opened a small cabinet and took out a decanter and two glasses. Then he returned to his visitor, to pour out drinks and wave Shane to a large overstuffed armchair.

"The cabs is running good enough, John," said Danny. He sipped the

liquor. "Brandy. Good stuff. Some of Whitey Slovak's?"

"No. Whitey never ran anything like that. I bid in on one lot of assorted liquors when they broke up Senator Danfield's cellar after he died."

Shane nodded and resumed his explanation.

"No, I ain't kicking about the hacking, John. I'm in another kind of jam. I don't know what can be done about it. Maybe you can do something."

"All right. Let's have it."

"It's about Frankie Russell."

Deker made a wry grimace. Then as he watched Shane his eyes narrowed thoughtfully. The two men were a decided contrast. Shane was a slight, dapper man of sketchy education and antecedents, endowed with a nature intensely loyal and ambitious, full of nervous energy and sudden enthusiasms. He had known Deker for a long time and was proud of their friendship. Deker, on the other hand, was a tall, lean waisted man, with dark, probing eyes and a thin, strong mouth. About the corners of both eyes and mouth were the tiny, mobile wrinkles of worldly wisdom and ironic humor. His long hands, when idle, had the calm repose of iron nerves. On the left one glowed a handsome ruby in an antique gold setting.

To Hagarton, Deker was an enigma, if a familiar one. He dressed habitually in well tailored black, which was odd; he always carried a stick, which in a city like Hagarton, where a cane was commonly associated only with the lame, the halt, or the aged, was even more singular; and his friends were few, though his acquaintance was wide. His closest tie had been his long friendship with old Matt Regan, Hagarton's gruff and cunning boss, now dead.

Deker's background was rumored to be one of good family and even of wealth, and a glance about his rooms made plain that he was at home among the good and gracious things of life. It was known that he gambled, cannily and with unfailing nerve; that he plunged in swift, profitable speculation where others only perceived opportunity too late; that he dabbled in Hagarton politics with the air of an amused observer; and that he was a very dangerous opponent in any game he entered. He was known to carry a gun, and it was rumored that he had used it effectively on occasion.

He was at home in Hagarton's drawing rooms and in its dens; he avoided the former and kept in touch with the shifting fortunes of the latter. Naturally, Deker had acquired enemies in Hagarton, and bitter ones, but they left him alone. They were commonly regarded as being very wise.

"So it's Frankie who's bothering you, eh?" Deker said. "Seems to me I've been hearing things about Frankie bothering a few others lately. Does he owe you money too?"

"Does he?" repeated Shane. He thrust forward an emphatic hand. "John, it's three grand! I can't let that go. I sunk 'most all the cash I could lay hands on in that Stenger-Britling bout, and my man came through. I placed it with Frankie, and now he's holding out. I took a chance 'cause I had to do it—either pull myself clean out of a bad hole, or go completely bust. If Frankie don't come across now, I'm bust!"

"What's he had to say?"

"Oh, hell. He's been giving me a stall. He ain't giving me the complete runaround. He's just stalling. And I can't wait. Believe me, if old Matt was alive today I could go to him, and Frankie would deliver quick. He knows it, too. But this town's changed a hell of a lot since they bumped off Matt Regan, and I'm just another mug around here any more."

Deker sipped the cognac reflectively, his eyes keen.

"Danny, you get around a bit. Have you ever come across anything in the way of a tip-off on that shooting?"

"No, John, I ain't. If I did, you'd get it. I know you're looking for it, and I guess the whole town knows that.

too. That's why real news is scarce—them that are anyway in the know are leary of talking, especially to you. You and Matt pulled together like nobody else, and this was a nice town when Matt ran things. It's all haywire now. Nobody knows who's on the make for that spot, and like plenty others that have gone gun shy, I'm steering clear of all of them, the cops and the liquor crowd and the money boys alike."

"Probably the wisest thing. You have a family and a business to attend to." Deker smiled from one side of his mouth, slowly. "Personally, I haven't, and I'd give a good deal to know who killed Matt Regan. Whoever it was, he's failed to cash in on it so far. Nobody's stepped up to fill Matt's shoes. I imagine the killer's afraid he'll give himself away, and the others are afraid of the killer. It's a mighty interesting situation. The process of shaking down hasn't ended yet, and I think a few more fireworks are due before it's over."

Shane frowned, looking at Deker.

"Why don't you take a crack at Matt's job yourself, John?" he asked. "You know Hagarton politics inside out. You could get plenty to back your play."

"No, Danny. Not for me." Deker laughed and finished his drink. "That's not my line. I'm a freelance, and satisfied. And about this Russell business: You give me a paper assigning that three thousand to me, and I'll see what can be done about it. Wait right here in my rooms, and I'll go find him tonight. I won't make any promises, but Frankie ought to listen carefully while I tell him a few things in a calm and quiet manner."

A hard glint entered Danny's gaze.

"Jeez, if he won't! I may be only a heel to him, but he won't try to clip you for three grand."

Deker smiled.

"Well, there are those who have tried, Danny."

"Yeah!" said Danny, dryly and succinctly. It was sufficient comment.

IT WAS one o'clock when John Deker emerged from the Dog Wagon, the seventh place he had visited, and walked across the public square toward Marsilio's Hole in the Wall. He nodded to a number of late idlers on the benches beneath the trees, and twice raised his walking stick in salutation to acquaintances in cars circling the little park.

The latter gesture identified him in Hagarton, for there was but one other stick habitually carried abroad in the resorts and about the busy thoroughfares, where in true American fashion the cane was regarded as a badge of leisure, or privilege or eccentricity. The other belonged to Jake Howell, the prosperous contractor and promoter, whose massive frame could never be confused with the tall, lean, military figure of John Deker. It is significant of the town's attitude toward the two men that it had never been able to look askance at either for this idiosyncrasy.

Deker thrust aside the swinging door in Marsilio's small entrance, and entered. He sauntered past the cigar and barbecue counters flanking the entry. Beyond, a great room spread widely, filled with the bright green oblongs of billiard tables. The place was fairly crowded with North Side night owls, and would be for a good two hours yet. Over against one wall was a broad counter desk with a cashier in charge, and before it, leaning comfortably on one elbow, was Marsilio himself. He was gross and genial and, from the rakish, fawn colored felt hat to the bulging tan shoes, habitually a little bit unkempt. He was wearing an enormous diamond in his tie. He raised a fat hand in greeting.

"I've been looking for Frankie Russell," Deker told him, leaning on the stick. "Seen him around, Tony?"

Marsilio delayed his reply, and his wide face slowly broke into a grin. Marsilio understood. In a city of one hundred and fifty thousand souls it is not usually difficult to find a man, es-

pecially a man like Frankie Russell. With Frankie a large part of the art of living consisted in keeping himself and his whereabouts known to a great number of the hundred and fifty thousand. Frankie kept "book" and accepted commissions in almost anything that involved money, and most of the floating gambling money in town passed through his hands. His stock in trade was composed of his accessibility, his genial grin, and his reputation for paying on the nose. If he were not to be found, the circumstance was odd.

"So you're looking for Frankie too?" Marsilio said to Deker. He laughed. "Many people are looking for Frankie tonight. Since he come back from his trip to Havana he has been the most popular guy in Hagarton. What's the matter, you out money?"

"No," said Deker dryly. "I'm in money. A good slice of that Kid Stenger money."

"You're lucky, Deker. Usually you're lucky anyway." It could readily be guessed from the fat man's ironic tone that dislike for the other lay behind that oily grin. "You better find Frankie quick if you want to make sure of your luck this time."

"Yes?" returned Deker, his dark eyes probing into Marsilio. "When I'm lucky there's generally no question about it, Tony. I'll find Frankie."

"He was in here a few minutes ago. We had a little talk." Marsilio paused and added, "I hope you get your money, Deker."

John Deker lighted a cigaret and smiled.

"I told you I'd find Frankie Russell, Tony. I'm finding him and collecting three thousand of that Stenger money. Sometime, just in friendship, maybe I'll let you in on a hot tip."

"Yeah?" said Tony.

"So long, Tony," said Deker.

John Deker grunted with dry humor once he was outside Marsilio's doors. Tony did not like him or anything about him, and he made small effort to conceal the fact. There was no grudge between them, merely an instinctive antagonism. They were worlds apart in blood, breeding and behavior. John Deker could smile and shrug his shoulders at Tony Marsilio, but Tony was too primitive to stifle the contemptuous envy that stirred inside him at sight of the gambler.

Tony Marsilio was no mere dive-keeper. He owned the Hole in the Wall, and a nice profit it brought him; but Tony's main interest was his reign over the entire North Side. He ruled a sizable section of the town populated by his countrymen, and he ran Hagarton's beer as well. In the latter field he enjoyed a monopoly. He was a director in two small banks, a stockholder in many enterprises, and a respected if somewhat feared figure in his community. Within the confines of his district he had heretofore recognized but one voice of superior authority, and that had been Matt Regan's.

Standing on the curbstone ouside the Hole in the Wall, Deker considered. If Russell had just left, he must have hastened. He was nowhere in sight. Something, beyond a doubt, was seriously wrong with Frankie Russell. Word had come to Deker that he was dodging people, and it had come from several sources. Tony seemed to be fully aware of it. Now Frankie was unquestionably shifty, but no professional gambler welched on a bet if he could avoid it. It was too risky. Much too risky.

Deker stepped from the curb and headed diagonally across the square through the little park. The ubiquitous idlers still lounged on the benches, their faces pale, indistinguishable spots in the leafy shadows. Deker walked smartly along the path. There were still places left to look for Frankie Russell.

SUDDENLY John Deker halted. Then he sidestepped quickly into deeper darkness alongside a tree. At an intersection in the paths ahead three men were engaged in a heated argument.

Two were arguing, that is, and a third was uttering something very much like a plea. The third, his face clear in the electric light from overhead, was Frankie Russell.

Several circumstances persuaded Deker to remain concealed for the present. First was his curiosity concerning Russell and his affairs. Second was the identity of the other two—Whitey Slovak, boss of Hagarton's liquor trade and a formidable power in the community of Slavs on the south side, and with him his lieutenant, Smoke Fallon. Third was the coincidence that the little circle of concrete on which they stood had been the most advertised spot in Hagarton for months. It was the scene of death of Matt Regan, who had been pumped full of bullets at high noon by two gunmen whose immediate flight had never been interrupted. The police in every city in the country were still looking for them, but in vain.

The voices of the three men were tense, though low pitched. Deker could not make out the subject of their dispute. He was still considering the possibility of approaching closer when Whitey Slovak suddenly cursed, stepped back and mouthed a curt order. Smoke Fallon promptly smashed an abrupt, vicious fist into Frankie Russell's face. Russell took the blow without uttering a sound, pitching violently to the pavement on his back. He remained there, leaning on one elbow and looking at Slovak. Whitey raised his voice:

"You sneaking rat, that don't even begin what you deserve! When you get muscled outta this world I'm going to be sitting on the sidelines, cheering. And maybe it won't be long."

Whitey looked at the fallen man a moment, spat on the ground, and jerked a command at Fallon to accompany him. The pair walked away from the spot without a backward glance.

For an interval Russell did not move. When he came to his feet it was with the air of a man in agony, though the blow could not have left him with more than a dull ache. He set off slowly along another path.

John Deker moved also, walking over the grass swiftly to the low fence enclosing the park. He stepped out on the sidewalk and turned toward one corner of the square. He watched Russell through the trees, timing his advance. He arrived at the corner a few paces ahead of Russell, who was unaware of Deker's presence until he was upon him.

" 'Evening, Frankie," Deker said. He eyed the man closely. "What's the matter, your liquor gone back on you?"

Russell instantly made an effort at nonchalance. He uttered a dry laugh.

"Not at all. Nothing like it. I'm O. K." He shook Deker's hand. "How goes it with you? I haven't seen you around. I was going to look you up."

"That's just what I've been doing, Frankie."

"Listen," said Russell. He looked around the Square vaguely. "Let's go over to Dan O'Farrell's awhile. I want to talk to you."

Dan O'Farrell's was not far. It was a basement in a dingy brick building two blocks from the square and one block from the railroad station, low ceilinged, dimly lighted and intimate. They walked past the bar, nodding to the half dozen patrons, and took possession of a small round table in the rear room. Business was slow, and they were alone. They ordered beers.

"Nice jaw you've got," commented Deker dryly.

"Yeah." Russell touched it gingerly. He shot a brief, suspicious glance at Deker, then his gaze dropped. He was a tall, soft man with pale eyelashes and loose, glib lips. "Had a little run-in," he explained. He laughed. "Wasn't nothing. John, I been wanting to see you."

"So I gathered. And I've wanted to see you even more."

"Yeah? What about?"

"You owe me money."

Russell stared.

"I owe *you* money?"

"Three thousand dollars. I've taken over Danny Shane's win. He needs the money. I helped him out. That's all."

Russell laughed again, shakily.

"Oh, of course. For a minute I thought—that is, I didn't understand. Well, I'll take care of that, all right."

"When?"

"Well, I'll tell you. I'll look you up, say, Friday for the pay-off."

"No, Frankie," Deker shook his head. "I want it now."

"I can't exactly do it right now, John. It's this way. I'm in a little jam. I can fix you up, but I want to ask that as a big favor. Let it run a coupla days."

"Nothing doing."

"I'm good for it, John," said Russell. "You know I am. I wouldn't go back on a friend." There was a note of desperation in his voice. "Let it run a little and I'll chip in a bonus. Say ten per cent."

"I don't need it," Deker said. "I do need the three grand."

Russell sat back in his chair, suddenly abandoning his effort. He made a vague, hopeless gesture with one hand. Then, spurred by his plight, he came back to the attack.

"You gotta do it, John. Dammit, I'm against a wall!"

Deker's eyes narrowed.

"You mean you can't deliver at all?"

"Well—practically I can't. Not now. I'm giving it to you straight."

Deker considered, slowly swirling the beer in his glass.

"That's too bad," he said. "A welcher—" Then he ceased speaking.

Two men were entering the room. They were two familiar figures throughout Hagarton, Jake Howell, contractor and builder, speculator and promoter, and his constant companion, Billy Flood. Howell was a great, broad shouldered man with a large, hard jaw and small, twinkling eyes. Flood, too, was a big man, horse faced, close mouthed and sharp of eye. Howell was one of the town's shrewdest and richest men, and Flood was his confidential agent. Jake Howell, whose rise to wealth had been spectacular, gave generously to campaign funds and charities, made friends with everybody, and practically monopolized the town's building and realty activities. He owned a major share in the local baseball club and financed all Hagarton's sporting events.

Russell quailed even before he turned to recognize the newcomers. At sight of them he made an effort, and recovered, offering them an enthusiastic welcome, drawing up chairs at the table. Deker watched him, remaining quietly seated, an ironic, faintly contemptuous smile on his lean mouth. Howell leaned on his stick and offered a booming greeting.

"How are you, John?" he said to Deker. "How goes the galloping bankroll? Well enough, I hope. Did you cut in on the doings at Latonia today?"

"I didn't," said Deker. "Otherwise everything's under control."

Howell bent his attention on Russell.

"What have you been doing, Frankie? Things picking up?"

"Not exactly, Jake. Not yet. The break's in sight, though."

"Sure it is!" Howell's booming voice was full of encouragement. "It's always around the corner, out of sight but on the way."

"You damn well bet it is!" declared Russell heartily, yet a bit too eagerly. He was obviously under a strain.

Deker, watching him, wondered. It was all very queer. Could the man be welching on everybody in town? Not likely. In fact, impossible. He handled too much money not to be able to repay somebody. And he would undoubtedly repay those he most feared.

This thought gave Deker an idea. His mind began to work with that combination of logic and intuition which guided his ruthless strategy at a poker table. He did not intend that Danny Shane, a protégé of old Matt and a square shooter, should be left holding the bag. He did not intend, further, that Russell's

peculiar and mysterious plight should go uninvestigated. John Deker had the most potent reasons these days for inquiring closely into anything unusual in Hagarton affairs. This was markedly unusual.

If Russell could be moved by fear, there remained a chance to collect the three thousand, and perhaps, by stirring things up, to uncover some of the hidden factors in the political crisis which had held grim sway over the town since the moment of Matt Regan's death. For very excellent reasons John Deker was known at every poker table he sat down to as a master of the gentle and dangerous art of bluffing.

Deker got up, and Russell interrupted his optimistic description of the future to look at him with veiled apprehension.

"Frankie," said Deker, his lip curling in a hard, contemptuous smile, "I guess we understand each other. I'm not discussing that matter any further with you. You deliver on the spot, understand? Or else—" And he made a wide, downward gesture with one hand, a gesture far from mysterious in its significance.

A bitter look came over Russell's face.

"Or curtains, eh?" he said with bleak humor.

Deker smiled without offering any explanation.

"I'll be seeing you," he told Frankie. He waved a brief farewell to the others, and walked out of the room.

DEKER stood for a moment outside O'Farrell's door. He was undecided about going home. Frankie could do nothing about that money tonight, apparently, but Deker's interest in the night's events had come to extend beyond the confines of his original errand. A hunch was brewing inside him. It was uncertain and indefinite, and was, in fact, more a sensation of suspense, mystifying and disturbing, than of actual expectation. There was mystery abroad, and John Deker was keenly interested in mysteries. He had turned one over and over in his mind for months without coming near a solution.

Between John Deker and Matt Regan there had existed one of those rare and purely masculine friendships which are based on the profoundest of mutual understanding. It was undemonstrative, effortless and wholly satisfying. They were unlike each other, yet they complemented each other. Their fields of activity were remote, yet they met on a common ground. Deker had never given thought to a possible end to their relationship, and Matt's death had torn suddenly from its moorings a substantial and elemental part of his life.

All Hagarton knew of the bond between the two men. It knew that John Deker was watching, waiting in his composed, unruffled fashion for the least sign that would betray the enemy of his friend. And Hagarton, dreading that unknown enemy even as it feared the vengeance of the friend, dropped its eyes before John Deker's even gaze, and avoided mention of the murder in his presence. Deker was well aware of this wall of silence about him; he understood it and realized that vigilance and patience were necessary to penetrate it.

He considered this immediate puzzle before him. What was the nature of the predicament in which Frankie Russell found himself? Why had Tony Marsilio spoken with such sinister irony of the man? Why had Whitey Slovak cursed him, and caused his lieutenant to strike that blow? It was common talk, Deker was aware, that Frankie Russell's trip to Havana for the races had been disastrous. How much he had lost, Deker did not know. There was much he did not know, much that was withheld from him, locked behind tight lipped and wary mouths. It did not seem reasonable, however much of his own money Russell had lost, to suppose that mere financial stringency could bring the man to his present state of panic. He was afraid of something, and it involved more than bad luck with the ponies. *Frankie Rus-*

sell was afraid of something. Deker turned this over and over in his mind.

O'Farrell's door opened, and Jake Howell and Billy Flood ascended the steps to the sidewalk. Howell looked at Deker.

"Oh, there you are, Deker. Just the man I wanted. I thought maybe you'd gone along. I promised Frankie I'd deliver his message. Billy and I are going over to the club to sit in on a game, and I was going to look for you in the joints on the way. Frankie wants to see you again, and said he'd wait here at Dan's till you came."

"He did, eh?"

"Yeah. He's a bit broken up over something, John. Maybe you can give him a break."

"Jake, wasn't it Shakespeare who said never give a sucker a break?" Deker returned pleasantly.

Billy Flood, standing by in silence, suddenly laughed.

"He only copied that from somewhere, John," he said dryly. "I hear they found it written on the walls of some stone age cave they excavated recently."

"If you look hard," said Deker, "I think you'll find it somewhere on the walls of most of the joints in Hagarton. Well, I'll see what Frankie has to say and think it over."

Russell was seated at the same table, and now he had a glass of whisky before him. He was staring into the amber liquid when Deker entered. A look of hollow confidence came on his face as Deker sat down. In a detached, impersonal way Deker felt sorry for him.

"Well, Frankie?" he said.

Frankie looked at him.

"I'm going to tell you a story," he said. But then he paused. He continued to look at Deker, turning over in his racked brain some momentous decision. "No, I don't think I will," he said suddenly. "Won't do any good. But I want to lay my cards on the table anyway with regard to that three grand."

Deker, wondering but not inquiring about the story that remained untold, found Russell rather more impressive now that he abandoned his futile pleading and turned to frankness. Russell began to lay before Deker the sum of his resources, and a rough sketch of his liabilities. He owned a little real estate, a small block of stock, a car, and some personal belongings of no great value. His jewelry had gone in Havana. He had a number of creditors, and his assets would have to be split up among them. To Deker he could give the greatest advantage. He could assign to him anything Deker chose of the lot to the value of half the three thousand. It would be just possible for him to make it, and retain enough to pay a little to the others. There was nothing more he could do.

Deker considered the proposal. It was a difficult decision to make. Were this sum his own winnings, it would not have been beyond John Deker to make a gesture and release the claim entirely. But the money was needed by another, and the other was also in an extremity. Danny Shane, of all Russell's creditors, probably needed the cash most desperately. He could not wait. It was a choice between Russell and Shane. Slowly Deker began to shake his head.

"Lord!" Russell ejaculated. "You got to do it! You don't know. It means—"

"It probably means curtains!" snapped Deker. "Your own word. You knew what you were doing when you walked into this. Somebody's got to wait for his money, and it's going to be somebody else!"

A telephone near the door came to life suddenly and began to ring. Russell looked around as the bartender walked into the room to answer it. After a brief exchange the man nodded to Russell.

"For you, Frankie. Somebody—no, dunno who."

Russell jumped from the chair and hastened to the instrument. Deker lighted a cigaret and settled back in the chair to wait.

The phone conversation was short. Frankie said "Yeah!" a couple of times, then listened for a moment. He con-

cluded by saying in an oddly strained voice:

"O. K. Just as you say. See you right away then." And he hung up.

There was a change in Russell's manner when he returned to Deker. He seemed numbed. It was as though he had exchanged the nervousness of anguish for the stupor of despair.

"I've got to go meet somebody," he said. "I'll be back. I'll be back soon as I can. Wait for me."

"How long will this take?" Deker asked. "Who are you meeting?"

"A guy I got to see. I'll be back. Honest, I can't stay to finish this now. You wait for me."

Deker's eyes narrowed. He shrugged.

"All right, go ahead. But I won't be waiting long."

"You won't have to." Russell pulled at his hat brim, pressed down his collar, and then turned suddenly and hastened from the room.

Deker sat still a few seconds. Then he came to his feet and ran silently across the room. He slowed, sauntered past the bar and went up to the street.

A large, dark Cadillac sedan was just drawing away from the curb. It got into motion with a rush and was far along the street in an instant. It turned sharply and disappeared at the next corner. Its tail light was dark, and the license numbers were invisible. Deker frowned, considered hailing the lone taxi which stood at the end of the street on the square, and decided against pursuit. He returned inside and ordered a drink at the bar.

Frankie Russell did not return to Dan's. Instead, he telephoned. He wanted Deker to jump in a cab and meet him immediately at the corner of Maple and Bolton.

"What's the idea?" Deker demanded in annoyance. The rendezvous was in a section of warehouses and factories near the river. "Why the hell should I go anywhere to meet you?"

"Now don't get sore, John. I can't explain, but it'll only be for a minute and will be well worth your while. I'll watch for you."

Deker did not answer for a second.

"Oh, hell—all right. But it had better be worth while!" He hung up.

Then Deker smiled to himself. Being sorry for Frankie was all very well—but putting the screws on Frankie brought results. Something, apparently, was about to develop. He swung the stick smartly and strode out of Dan O'Farrell's.

When he had called a cab and climbed inside Deker reached to his rear pocket. In the pocket nestled a flat, blunt muzzled automatic. Deker threw off the safety and thrust the gun down his belt against his stomach. He loosened the two lower buttons of his vest. Then he sat back.

The cab halted at the corner of Maple and Bolton, and the driver looked back inquiringly at his passenger. Deker peered through the windows. No one was in sight. The taxi was halted alongside an excavation job where a new factory was to rise.

Swearing softly, Deker came out of the cab. He hesitated a moment, then paid the driver and added half a dollar to the fare.

"Come back in half an hour," he ordered the man. "If I'm not here, don't wait. But I may need you then."

"O. K, chief!" said the driver. He stepped on the gas and departed.

Deker waited. It was possible that he had arrived sooner than Frankie anticipated. He strolled alongside the great hole yawning where an old warehouse had stood for years, idly looking it over. Near the corner there was a shanty and piles of lumber and other material. The neighborhood was quiet and dark and deserted. It was along the riverfront district that Whitey Slovak maintained a warehouse supply depot. Deker wondered if the coming meeting was to include Whitey.

Suddenly Deker went still, and his hand came to rest on his gun. He peered into a recess between the shanty wall

and a stack of timber. There was a man there. He lay on his stomach, Deker perceived, his face resting on one arm and his hat drawn over his eyes. Deker came closer. Then he made out a flask half full of whisky resting close by the man's outflung hand. From the man came an acrid odor of cheap liquor.

Deker smiled and shrugged. He thrust forward his stick to stir the sleeper, then thought better of it and walked on. None of his business.

Minutes passed slowly, and still there was no sign of Russell. Suspicion began to stir within John Deker. Something was probably afoot, though its exact nature remained incalculable. Russell might have desired Deker's absence from the center of town for awhile, or might have lost his nerve at the last minute and failed to come. He had lost courage once tonight, when just about to make some manner of important disclosure to Deker. Deker wished he had pressed him for that story.

A light automobile came trundling up Bolton Avenue, its headlights bobbing and blinking. Deker watched its approach from the corner. It proved to be a police car with a cop at the wheel patrolling his beat. He drew up at the corner and promptly recognized Deker.

"Oh, hello, Deker," he said. "I saw somebody standing there, and wondered who it was."

"Hello, Cleary," said Deker. "Believe it or not, I'm down here on a date."

"In this section?" said Cleary. "Watch out, Deker, their husbands come big and tough around here!" They both grinned.

"It was with a man who was to pay me some money," Deker explained. "But I'm afraid it's a stand-up."

"Tough. Want a lift over to the car line?"

"I have a taxi coming for me soon. I'll wait. Meantime, if it interests you, there's a likely job for you on the other side of that shack."

"Yeah?" said Cleary.

He looked around, then slid out of the seat. He walked to the shack, full of curiosity. Deker strolled after him. The cop peered into the recess, grunted, and delivered a hearty kick at one foot of the drunk. The drunk did not stir.

"Come outa there!" ordered the cop.

He repeated the kick, then reached down and hauled strenuously at a limp leg. The drunk slid a few inches, rolling slowly on his back. Cleary dropped the leg and stared at the face.

"Holy mother!" he exclaimed.

He pulled a flashlight from his pocket, and threw the beam on the man's face. It was set in an inhuman, anguished expression, and the eyes were staring wide. Deker looked, and a chill shot instantly along his spine.

The drunk was no other than Frankie Russell, and he was not drunk; he was dead.

DURING the ensuing few minutes Officer Cleary was more troubled by the presence of John Deker than by the presence of a dead man. It was incredible that Deker could have killed a man and then stood idly by until a policeman wandered on the scene. It would be incredible of any man, and this was not any man, but the John Deker whom all Hagarton knew and regarded with a certain familiar awe, and respected for his acknowledged ability to take excellent care of himself in any emergency. But one could never tell. Cleary guardedly requested that Deker submit to search, and was greatly relieved at his amused acquiescence. He confiscated the gun, then politely ordered Deker into the little car. They drove off together, and raced to the nearest police call box.

Cleary's report aroused headquarters to instant action. His orders were prompt and precise; he was to return to the scene of the crime and to hold Deker until relieved. These orders once more put Officer Cleary at ease, for headquarters now assumed responsibility for the delicate situation. John Deker might very conceivably have killed a man, but Officer Cleary did not enjoy the position

of accuser.

"Whether you done it or not ain't no concern of mine, Deker," he was careful to explain. "But either way, I got to see you're here when they come."

"Quite understandable," Deker conceded. "I should never have come here, but that's my fault, not yours. I won't run. At least I know better than that. I've seen your work on a target in headquarters basement."

"Good enough," said the officer grimly. "Now we'll just sit here in the car for the time being."

Deker offered the patrolman a cigaret and lighted one himself.

"Cleary," he sighed, "don't ever make any dates with fool gamblers on deserted street corners after twelve at night."

"No fear. I won't."

"Still, at that, it's some consolation to know that I wasn't stood up."

The officer looked at Deker. Obviously he wondered if he were being kidded.

"Yeah, it must be!" he said emphatically.

"It is," said Deker.

Frankie Russell was a figure of sufficient prominence in Hagarton to bring out a sizable crowd of officials to investigate his killing. An ordinary North Side murder rated a police patrol, the medical examiner and a brace of detectives. This homicide roused out in addition the chief of police, the district attorney, a squad of detectives and a scattering of reporters. The unfailing magnetism of death also drew to the scene a fringe of onlookers to peer excitedly and ask inane questions and get in the officials' way.

The medical examiner reported Russell dead only a short time. It was now a quarter past two, and he set the death at a quarter of two. The body bore one wound, a stab over the heart indicating the thrust of a keen and shrewdly placed weapon, possibly a stiletto. It had been instantly fatal. Comparatively little blood had flowed because of the quick stoppage of circulation and the small size of the wound.

There was no clue to be found which might hint at the identity of the murderer. The bottle of whisky, half of which was simply sprinkled over the victim's clothes, was obviously a plant, intended to deceive any one stumbling on the body, delaying discovery. The bottle was carefully wrapped for later scrutiny for fingerprints, though the clean, glistening surface of the glass suggested that the killer had taken the precaution to remove such evidence before leaving it.

Deker told a composed and careful story to the district attorney, standing with his weight resting idly on his stick in the light from the corner lamp post, a figure of disinterested nonchalance. Otis Pladwell and he had long been acquainted, but the district attorney stood on no ceremony. With the political situation as it was, a dramatic conviction now would be the biggest break of his career. He heard Deker out, and then came back with shrewd searching questions.

Deker's story was a straightforward account of the past three hours, from his encounter with Danny Shane in the entryway to his meeting with Officer Cleary here. He omitted the incident in the park involving Whitey Slovak and Smoke Fallon because it had no bearing on his own case, and he simply suggested the general trend of the various conversations which occurred.

"How much did you say Russell owed you?" Pladwell demanded suddenly when Deker was through.

"Nothing," Deker replied. "He owed Shane three thousand dollars."

"Just why did you go to so much trouble collecting for some one else?"

"Because he was a friend."

"And that's all?"

"Did you ever happen to have a friend, Otis?" Deker asked with a touch of sarcasm.

Pladwell ignored this. He persisted:

"Didn't it occur to you that it was queer that Russell should ask to come to this out of the way place at such an hour?"

"Certainly it did. But he begged me to come, and said he couldn't explain on the wire. He acted queerly all night, and I was curious to find out what was up."

"Hm." The district attorney looked at Deker. "You were on the scene of the crime immediately after its commission, you admit what is a plausible motive, yet you deny committing the homicide as a matter of record?"

"It couldn't be put more plainly," said Deker. "I deny it absolutely." He smiled, watching the other.

"That's all necessary for the present, then," said the district attorney crisply. "You'll come along with us to headquarters and conclude matters there. You may consider yourself under arrest as a material witness."

At police headquarters the investigation continued. But here, with big Tim Masterson, the chief of police, conducting the inquiry, it took on a different tenor. Masterson was a good politician; he was affable, witty, apologetic to his good friend John Deker, yet withal quite ruthless beneath his suave exterior. Masterson, ruddy, powerful of frame and brightly blue of eye, would have grinned as he sprung the trap for his good friend John Deker, could he have the credit for his conviction. Not for a moment did Masterson forget that a man lay murdered in Hagarton tonight.

John Deker maintained the same ironic and unruffled exterior through it all. His manner implied an understanding shared by the chief and himself that these formalities were to be regarded as rather silly, but unavoidable. He replied to every question with disarming frankness, and did not hesitate over certain details which might be considered damaging.

Most of this occurred in the chief's own office, where Deker was seated comfortably in a great leather armchair. He remained so seated, with one detective for company, when the grilling was suddenly abandoned. A headquarters attendant entered the room with a whispered message for the chief's ear, and the officials precipitately retired.

"Well, Chonsky," Deker said to the detective, "I guess that's that." He ignored the unexplained departure of the others. "And now, who do you think killed Frankie Russell?"

"Hell, you should ask!" returned the detective. He was a stocky man with small, professionally suspicious eyes. "You was with him tonight. You ought to be able to make a good guess."

"Yes, I was with him." Deker leaned forward, elbows on the arms of his chair. "I know several of the men he talked with. But I don't know whom he met after he left me."

"It might be any of two dozen," said Chonsky. "We knew around the house here that plenty guys were down on him for welching."

"Chonsky," Deker said suddenly, watching the officer closely, "what's the unofficial theory around the house as to the murder of Matt Regan?"

Chonsky looked oddly at Deker.

"There ain't any. Not for publication. It ain't exactly safe to have one. You ain't been publishing any yourself that I heard of."

"True enough. If I mentioned Whitey Slovak's name, for instance, Whitey might take it seriously and go into a panic from which I would emerge pumped full of lead."

"You think he done it?"

"I said 'if', Chonsky. I might say Jake Howell just as easily, or Tony Marsilio, or Mayor Strong."

"Or the Reverend Malcolm Lurie that's made a swell racket out of preaching against corruption in high places." Chonsky grinned.

"Exactly," said Deker. He sat back and stared at the ceiling, blowing slow clouds of cigaret smoke upward through the still air. Presently he said, "Chonsky, I can't help wondering if there isn't some connection somewhere between the murder of old Matt and the knifing of Frankie Russell."

Chonsky merely looked at him, grunted skeptically, and spat into a tall brass

cuspidor. The door opened, and Tim Masterson walked in, followed by his retinue.

IT WAS three-thirty that morning when John Deker walked out of police headquarters. He was a free man again. A quick check-up had sustained him in every detail of his story, it seemed. The police were thankful for his account of events preceding the murder, but he was not sufficiently helpful to be regarded as a witness who required detention.

"You can go along, John," big Tim Masterson told him. "You know well enough what to do. Keep your mouth shut and your eyes open for trouble, and be on hand if we want you."

"You know where to find me," Deker replied. "Sorry to be so little help."

"That's all right. It's too bad you got mixed up in it at all. Do you want me to send along a man to see you home?"

"Thanks, no. I can take care of myself. And by the way, how about my gun?"

"Your gun? I didn't know you had a gun." He reached into a desk drawer and drew forth the automatic. "If you mean this cigaret lighter, why take it along."

"Thanks!" said Deker, dropping it into a coat pocket. "Be seeing you soon, Tim."

"Well, not too soon, John!" Masterson laughed. "This is one job where a man don't like to see his friends too often."

The square was one block from the city hall. Once away from headquarters doors, Deker hastened. His bland air of nonchalance dropped from him like a cloak. It was as if some deep store of energy concealed beneath a glazed and brittle surface welled up and burst through.

The square was deserted, but a gleam of light within Marsilio's Hole in the Wall betrayed the fact that Hagarton was not yet entirely asleep. Deker knew well that a goodly number of other lights glowed behind drawn shades tonight. Not because a gambler had been done to death, for Frankie Russell was but an insignificant if tragic pawn in a game that had proved too much for him. Rather, because in addition to that ruthless move there had been another of deeper import, and it had failed. John Deker, the friend of old Matt Regan, had been framed for murder, and by some miscalculation had escaped. The months of waiting had ended; the enemies of old Matt had come forth once more. They had sown the wind, and the whirlwind would be their reaping.

In one corner of the square a lone night owl taxi waited patiently for a fare. Deker whistled and raised his stick. The cab responded instantly and came tearing over to him. Deker gave his home address and jumped inside.

The lights in his apartment were glowing in every window as he approached. He bade the cab wait, and hastened upstairs. Letting himself in, he called Danny Shane from the foyer. There was no response. Deker stopped dead on the threshold of the living room. His eyes suddenly were narrowed and chill, and his lips were thin.

Shane was gone, and the room was in a state of devastation. A second glance over it disclosed that it was a precise and careful devastation. Objects were overturned, but not broken. The furniture was in disorder, but undamaged. Drawers and cabinets were dumped of their contents, yet so far as Deker could see nothing of value was missing.

Deker walked into the other rooms. They were all in the same condition. He touched nothing, but immediately went to the telephone. He awakened a somnolent operator and gave her a number.

Response was slow, and then a woman's voice spoke over the wire in a tone midway between sleep and alarm.

"Mrs. Shane," he said to her, "this is John Deker. Is Danny there?"

"John Deker? No, he isn't here, Mr. Deker. He hasn't come home yet. Is there anything wrong?"

"No. I just wanted to talk to him about a money matter. Sorry to disturb you, Mrs. Shane."

"That's all right. If you see Danny, will you tell him either to call me or to come home? He was upset about something tonight, Mr. Deker, and I can't help worrying when he stays out late."

"I'll do that. Goodby." He hung up.

After a moment of reflection beside the instrument, Deker turned out the lights in the apartment. In the bedroom he hesitated, then walked to the closet and hung his malacca stick on the rod. He selected another, a slender, straight piece of ebony with a tip that was a blunted point of hard steel. Then he returned downstairs and got into the cab. He directed the driver to an address two blocks beyond the city hall.

When the cab ended the journey the driver pulled on the brake and looked dubiously up a dark alley leading off the street. Deker reassured him and climbed out. Glancing into the alley, he saw a dim form moving. It vanished into a doorway, and the alley was deserted. Deker paid the driver and walked into the alley.

In a recess to the left, some distance in the alley, there was a door, invisible in the darkness. Deker found the knob and turned it. The door was locked. He tapped on the door panel with his stick.

Deker was forced to wait several minutes, and to knock a second time sharply, before there was a response. A gruff, annoyed voice called through the door:

"What the hell you want? I told you the joint's closed."

"Pete, this is John Deker. Let me in."

The other did not respond immediately, but finally he spoke in an altered tone:

"I'm sorry, Deker. We're really closed. I got orders. Nothing doing tonight."

"Pete, is Danny Shane there?"

"No, he ain't. Nobody's here, Deker."

"The hell you say! Tell Whitey Slovak I want to speak to him."

"Whitey ain't here, Deker. Ain't nobody here, I tell you. Come around tomorrow."

"Pete," said Deker with restrained anger, "you're a liar and a damn fool. If I didn't know you better I'd say something more. Tell Whitey for me I won't forget this."

"O. K, Deker. I'll tell him. But I got me orders."

Deker strode away from the door, and the point of the stick struck the pavement sharply as he walked.

Something suddenly touched Deker's consciousness with a stinging pinprick of warning. He did not know what it was; it might have been the merest sound of leather on gravel, or the hard breathing of a man, or a sheerly intuitive awareness of another's presence. Deker spun about on the instant, his back to a building wall.

Some one was running silently toward him. Two dim blobs of darkness, in fact, were charging upon him in the deep night. They were completely unrecognizable in the unlighted alley. Sinister and stealthy, they were almost upon him.

Deker grunted, and brought up the ebony stick, the steel point outthrust. His two attackers slowed, aware that their presence was discovered. But they did not halt; grimly they spread apart, to place him between them.

Viciously Deker lunged with leveled stick. The hard point found its objective, and a guttural gasp of distress betrayed the fact that the blow was a telling one. The other man closed in. Deker swung the stick in a sweeping circle. There was a sharp impact of wood on metal, and a long blade slithered down the length of the stick and glanced off Deker's knuckles. His hand became wet with blood.

Many years had come and gone since John Deker last had stood, decorously masked and padded, on a gymnasium floor with a long, slender wisp of steel in his hand, and exchanged parry and thrust with a master. But his hand had not lost its cunning. This was no gym floor where he could watch an opponent's eyes and deftly anticipate each move; it

was a pitch dark alley where two men were driving him against a brick wall and an invisible knife was seeking to bury itself in his body. Yet Deker only grunted and in the darkness his teeth were bared in an intense grin of satisfaction.

The ebony stick slashed, humming through the air, poised midway, and darted straight forward to its target. It recovered, and leaped to another objective. It was impotent to kill or disable, and Deker could not halt long enough to draw his gun, but that steel point became a living, fluid wall beyond which the pair could not come. No one spoke a word; the only sound in the alley was the scuffing of feet on the hard earth.

Then Deker was down. He had stepped back, and a stone had rolled beneath his foot. Realizing instantly that recovery was impossible, he had assisted in the fall, and flung himself headlong away from the pair. He let go the stick, and his hand sought his rear pocket. The gun came out, and he pulled trigger even before attempting to level the muzzle on a target.

The shot crashed and echoed in the little alley. The two men were taken unawares. Evidently they believed the fall to be but a ruse. Their attempt to kill Deker with the knife now was hopeless, and a gun duel would arouse the neighborhood. They took to their heels and ran, as swiftly and silently as they had come. The darkness swallowed them.

Deker came to his knees. He leveled the automatic, aiming by instinct, and squeezed the trigger. But he did not fire. He released the trigger, felt for the stick, and sprang to his feet. He stood poised on alert toes for a second, listening. Then he pocketed the gun and ran speedily for the street.

No one was in sight along the street. He raced toward the nearest corner, pressing close to the buildings, and turned sharply. Here the avenue was lined with spreading maples, and there were shadows. Deker walked steadily along the curb, his eyes alert, and became but a floating, inconspicuous shadow in the quiet night.

THE street lights of the Hole in the Wall were darkened, but above the cashier's desk a green shaded lamp cast a bright circle of illumination. Within the circle three men lounged. They were a young cousin of Tony's and two other familiars of the place. The boss was gone, but he was taking no chances; he had left behind him a trusted lieutenant and two aides to wait and watch and listen through the night, and to report to him by telephone any news that would warrant his attention. Deker looked at the trio closely before speaking. There were many things he must find out tonight, and Tony could help him—if he would. But these three must be dealt with first.

"Where's Tony?" he asked.

"Gone home," said Angelo, the cousin. "Why?"

They knew that Deker had been held for murder tonight, yet they asked no questions. They must have learned of his release as quickly as it occurred. Deker wondered what reaction it would evoke if he were to tell of the attack in the alley.

"I'd like to see him," Deker replied to the question.

"What about?"

"I said I wanted to see Tony," Deker repeated evenly.

Angelo, a slender, dapper young man, shrugged. He lighted a cigaret, then rose from his chair and strolled back into the darkened room. He went into a telephone booth, and the bell in the coin box tinkled.

Deker examined his clothes and brushed off the dust he had gathered in his fall. The other two watched him with opaque eyes, saying nothing. In a moment Angelo strolled up to them.

"You know Marge Shipman?" he demanded of Deker.

Deker gave him a faint smile; and a gleam of amusement answered it.

"Of course. Will I find him at her place?"

"Yeah," Angelo said dryly. "He says come on over."

"Thanks," said Deker. "I'll do it right away."

He was conscious of the three pairs of eyes following him as he went outside. The three shared between them something from which he was excluded, something which appealed to their Latin sense of humor. Deker frowned slightly and wondered. He raised his stick, and again the night owl cab came racing around the square in answer to his hail.

Marge Shipman's house was a comfortable little frame dwelling on North River Street, overlooking River Park on the banks of the Shongahela. Marge had lived here one year, ignored by her neighbors and ignoring them. She did not miss their dull, middle class company. Tony and Tony's friends and Tony's impulsive generosity more than made up for the loss.

There was one light in the house. Deker judged it to be the dining room, and when Marge admitted him in response to his ring, he found he was correct. Marge was alone, though on the table there were two bottles of whisky, a siphon of seltzer and several glasses.

"Tony said you were coming," Marge told him. "He'll be back; he had to go some place for a minute. Sit down and make yourself at home."

"Glad to," said Deker. "How've you been, Marge?"

"Fine and dandy!"

Marge, plump and young, blond and pretty, uneducated but far from unintelligent, smiled at him. She poured two drinks, and sat at the table. Deker took a chair opposite and looked at her. She was not hard to look at, and Tony's interest was not difficult to understand. Tony had a wife and a numerous brood of children, and Tony clung to them and kept them in affluence. It was here, nevertheless, that Tony relaxed and basked in Marge's florid, glowing beauty, and it was here that Tony entertained most of his intimate friends.

"So poor Frankie got his tonight, John," Marge said. "That was too bad. He was a good enough guy if they only left him alone."

"Yes, he was," Deker agreed. "Frankie tried to take in too much territory, I guess. His racket got too big for him to control. He should never have gone to Havana."

Marge winked and sipped her drink. She spoke with deep significance.

"Now you're saying something!" she told him.

Something within John Deker sprang to attention. He was on the right track. This woman knew more than she would readily tell, knowing her town. Information Deker must have, no matter the source. Outwardly he merely smiled.

"The smartest of us finds himself playing the sucker every now and then," he said. "It was Frankie's turn, and he got his."

"He was a fool and a sucker both," said Marge. "He framed himself from the start by ever going to Havana. Any mug would know enough, being in the clear, to stay that way." Suddenly a cunning light came into the gaze which she fastened on Deker. "Look here, John, how much do you really know about—well, about Frankie Russell?"

"Not much," admitted Deker. "Why? How much do you know?"

She looked at her drink and tossed it off quickly.

"No more than you do, I guess. Just enough to keep my mouth shut, same as everybody else around Hagarton."

Deker watched her with eyes like gimlets. He leaned forward.

"Marge, did Tony knock off Mat Regan?" he asked.

She laughed, looking him squarely in the eye. She had the assurance of a woman who has handled men and is conscious of her ability to cope with them. Her response told him nothing.

"Wouldn't you like to know?" she taunted.

"I would—very much."

"Well, find out then. What good would it do you? Matt's gone and he's ancient history now."

"Not yet. No one has taken his place."

Marge studied him.

"John, how is it you haven't made a pass at running this town? You're awfully high hat. You could do it easy, and get plenty to rally around you. I thought sure for a time after Matt was killed that you'd step right into the job. You're about the only candidate nobody has suspected of the murder, knowing how thick you and Matt were. And here you are still lone wolfing around town and not raising a hand."

"I don't want the job of running Hagarton," Deker told her. "Strange as that may seem to some people, it's true. Why should I want it? I've all my life been a free agent and always will be. Hagarton's my town and I like it. I know it inside out, and to me it's the best show on earth. I get a bigger kick out of one common council election than I would out of another European war."

She studied him gravely a moment, then said—

"You're what you might call an adventurer, aren't you, John?"

"We have tastes in common, Marge," he said, smiling. "I like to pull the strings and I enjoy the show, but I don't want to take part in it."

Her eyebrows slowly elevated; then she asked another question—

"But aren't you sort of taking a part in it right now, John?"

"How?"

"Well—for example, this Matt Regan business?"

His smile faded but his eyes held hers. He spoke slowly, his voice flint-like.

"Maybe I am at that," he said. "You never can tell."

There came a sound of feet tramping on the porch, and she sprang up to go to the door. Left to himself, Deker grunted and stared at the liquor he was slowly swirling in the little glass. Marge Shipman, too, was a good gambler.

TONY MARSILIO and three other men entered the room on a gust of talk and laughter. Tony greeted Deker casually yet loudly, removed his coat and vest, hung them on a chair, and sprawled in a position of comfort on a couch against one wall. The three men with him, friends and satellites, took chairs about the room. Tony fixed Deker with his beady eyes.

"So you got clear after all, eh?" he asked.

"Certainly," said Deker. "Why not?"

"Ho-ho! For plenty good reason, my friend. I said you were lucky once tonight, and I say it again." The three men silently echoed Tony's humor, grinning at him. "You know how lucky?" Tony asked Deker.

"I know. Two men came at me with a knife in an alley a little while ago. This is as far as they got." Deker exhibited his right hand, on which the shallow gash had closed and was already healing.

They all stared at the hand as though fascinated. An intense interest quickened in Tony's eyes.

"You saw them?" Tony demanded.

Deker gave him a knowing smile for answer.

"Let me tell you something I didn't tell the cops," he said, changing the subject. He proceeded to give them a detailed account of the incident in the little park involving Russell, Slovak and Fallon.

Tony gazed at the ceiling when he was through, his eyes bright. Then he looked at Deker.

"You think Whitey did it?"

"What do you think?"

Tony got up abruptly. He went to the chair and took up his coat and vest and put them on. He was smiling shrewdly.

"You come with me," he told Deker. "I will show you something."

"Oh, no, Tony," Deker drawled. "I leave the way I came, by myself."

Tony paused with vest half buttoned.

His mood quickly changed.

"So!" he said shortly. "That is what I wanted to know. I have nothing to show you, Deker. I ask you to come with me to see if you are afraid. And you are afraid. Why?" He looked at Deker narrowly. "You do not think Whitey killed Frankie Russell; you think somebody else. Who?"

"I'm not afraid of you, Tony. I just have no confidence in that sweet Italian temper of yours where I'm concerned."

Clouds gathered in Tony's dark eyes.

"You will tell me who you are thinking killed Frankie Russell."

"The hell I will—until I'm ready to nail him," said Deker.

"Deker, I don't trust you," breathed Tony.

The others in the room sat perfectly still, tense with awareness of the hot emotion springing to flame in their midst. Tony was feared in his own bailiwick, and not without reason. He was a Latin, impulsive, vengeful and ruthless, and he possessed power. Suspicion goaded him, suspicion of the thoughts hidden in John Deker's brain. John Deker, he felt, owned a ruthlessness equal to his own and a subtlety that was far beyond him. If John Deker suspected him of murder, Tony was in a bad spot—and knew it and reacted according to his nature.

"Deker," Tony said, "it is time for a showdown. You are going to talk tonight or you do not leave this house."

"How will you stop me?" asked Deker. He was enjoying himself.

Tony flashed an imperceptible signal to a man behind Deker. Deker heard a click, the sound of a revolver hammer cocking. He did not turn. He laughed softly.

"You think you can bluff me with threats in this house, Tony? I know you wouldn't pull anything here, so climb down off that wave you're riding. How about that, Marge?"

Marge got up and swayed deliberately across the room, hands on hips. Her eyes were bright and calculating as she looked at the two men.

"All right, Tony," she said. "Leave him alone. It won't do any good, and you're certainly not going to mess up my dining room."

He glanced at her and his lip curled. But he restrained the retort that sprang to his lips. He grunted, eyed Deker, and then took off his coat and vest. The man behind Deker watched him, then put away his gun. Deker got up.

"Now that's settled, I guess I better go. I'll answer that question, Tony, in good time. You won't miss it. Sorry, Marge; I'll be better company next time maybe." He backed away smilingly, waved negatively when the woman made as if to see him to the door, and abruptly was gone.

Out on the street the taxi was waiting. Deker jumped in, and the cab shot up North River Street at full throttle. Alone, he frowned. If anything, his visit had made the mystery only deeper. From Tony he would get nothing. From Marge? His eyes narrowed in concentration.

The next stop was on a street of darkened shops near the railroad station. Deker walked into a doorway alongside a tobacco shop, mounted a flight of stairs and knocked on a door on the landing. A peephole opened, and then a chain was drawn and the door swung wide. Deker entered.

The Palace Club was not large, but it was one of Hagarton's most noted institutions. It was furnished with an air of subdued elegance designed to provide a fitting background for the games which were played nightly on the roulette table, the crap tables and the poker tables scattered through the several rooms.

Deker exchanged nods with a number of men who looked up from their play, and walked through the establishment. A couple of the tables were deserted, but despite the hour the club was far from empty. Deker looked into every room, ascertaining who was present in each, and then retraced his steps, frowning. He paused beside a stud game for

a moment to watch the house man, in green eye shade and black sleeve protectors, deftly slide the cards from the pack in his hand. The house man completed a round and looked up, his gaze expressing sudden interest.

When the betting was ended, the dealer passed out another round, the last. The betting was promptly resumed. It became heated, and ended when all but one player dropped out. The winner drew in the chips and passed his cards to the dealer to be shuffled in the deck without revealing the hole card. Without comment the house man expertly mixed the deck. Looking up, he said to Deker:

"Well, well, look who's here! I understand you got into a little trouble tonight, John?"

"Oh, no," said Deker, leaning on the cane. "That was a couple of other guys. One of them was Frankie. The other hasn't been found yet."

"They claim he has, John. Didn't you hear?"

"No. Hear what?"

"About Danny Shane."

Deker's face was a mask.

"Danny Shane?" he repeated.

"The same. He was picked up fleeing from the scene of the crime about half past two."

Deker said nothing. He could think of nothing to say. The house man began to pass out the cards for the next hand. John Deker turned and walked through the rooms out of the club. On his face was a look of baffled consternation. He climbed in his taxi and bade the driver take him directly to police headquarters.

THE sun was high and full and the new day far progressed when John Deker again walked into his rooms at King and Maple. As though by a miracle the furnishings had been placed in order. Deker walked into the big room, tossed his hat and stick on a couch, looked about and called—

"Louis! Are you there, Louis?"

A man immediately appeared from the bedroom. He was a slender, deft fingered man of middle age with a narrow face and watchful black eyes, and about him was tied a blue muslin work apron. Louis Albert had looked after Deker and Deker's comfort for five years, and his devotion to the task was the more intense for the fact that the preceding five years had been spent in a living hell at Raeburn Prison. Deker, asking nothing, requiring nothing, had given Louis his only chance that day five years before, and Louis's memory was long.

"Working hard, Louis?" Deker asked.

"Kind of, sir." Louis smiled. "There was a little extra to be done when I got here this morning."

"Nothing missing, was there?"

"Don't seem to be."

Deker walked to the cabinet and poured himself a drink.

"Been a large night, Louis. You've seen the papers, of course?"

"Yes, sir. Is Danny Shane still being held?"

"He is. I tried for hours to see him, and finally had to give up. Headquarters is being very cagey. I guess they're figuring on the odd chance that Shane and I worked together somehow. I'm not sure. Tim Masterson was polite as hell, but I couldn't get past him on any grounds."

Louis asked the question that had been on the tip of his tongue during all the time he had been awaiting Deker's homecoming.

"Who was it gave these rooms the workout last night, sir?"

"The dicks." Deker, glass in hand, dropped into a chair, frowning. "They raced around town like bloodhounds while I was first being held, checking up. I guess a couple came here and got in through a window. They must have gone through the house like a tornado. What I still don't know is where Danny Shane was when they arrived. I left him sitting here with orders to stay here till I returned. Nobody saw him

between that time and the time he was pulled out of an alley down near the river by one of the cops. The neighborhood was crawling with police for awhile."

Louis looked at his employer and then idly ran a cloth over a polished table top.

"Shane was picked up at two-thirty," he said. "You were turned loose at three-thirty. All the time they held you they had him in hand too. They let you go and kept him. That means they got a case against him. Maybe it *was* Danny Shane did the job!"

Deker spoke after a moment of reflection.

"The autopsy says the weapon was some kind of blade almost as fine and thin as a hatpin. It was three sided, they believe, which ought to mean that it was made of the keenest steel. It was long enough to spit Frankie clean through from front to back. Now where in hell would Danny get anything like that? And who else would have it? Hardly Whitey Slovak—he'd do a gun job. Tony Marsilio? Hm. Tony's a Sicilian, and so are most of his crowd."

"I seen jobs like that myself back in Camorra days," Louis volunteered. "Stiletto jobs. Clean and quick and quiet."

Deker got up, poured himself another drink and tossed it down.

"Well, we'll soon know for certain," he said grimly. "We have one fact to work from—whoever killed Frankie Russell also had Matt Regan killed. And intends to kill me because my mere existence in this town is dangerous to him." He paused and looked at Louis. "Look here, Louis, what gossip have you picked up about Frankie lately?"

"Not much, sir. I heard he went broke in Havana and that he owed lots of money around town. Marsilio is stuck for quite a sum, for one. Pete Lannon, the hotel man, George Haskell, the real estate man across the river, Stevie Russo—they're scattered all over."

"Tony, too, eh? That's something I wanted to know. How about Whitey Slovak?"

"I haven't heard anything about Whitey. I don't think Whitey was stuck for anything."

"Frankie must have gone to the cleaners for fair! He was welching on half the town. Well, I'm taking a shower and changing these clothes. I have plenty left to do."

The telephone halted Deker as he was entering the bedroom. He paused while Louis answered.

"Mr. Flood on the wire," said Louis, covering the mouthpiece.

"I'll take it," said Deker, walking over.

"Deker, this is Billy Flood," came over the wire. "I want to talk to you. Are you coming downtown or do you want me to come up?"

"What about? Can you give it to me on the wire?"

"I'd rather not."

"Good enough. I'll be seeing you. Where?"

"I'll be in the lobby of the Metropole."

"O. K," said Deker.

He bathed and dressed quickly, feeling considerably relieved. Meanwhile he gave Louis his instructions. Louis was to remain in the rooms all day, ready to receive any phone message. He was to stand ready to answer Deker's summons to join him if necessary, and he would arm himself with an automatic if called. He would plead ignorance of Deker's whereabouts if questioned, but would offer to take any message.

Deker was in the little kitchen, sipping a hot cup of coffee freshly prepared by Louis, when the phone rang again. Deker put down the empty cup and walked into the bedroom for his hat and stick while Louis answered the call.

"Won't give any name, sir," Louis said, holding out the instrument to Deker when he reentered the room. Deker nodded, taking it from him.

"Deker speaking," he said.

The voice which answered him had an odd, muffled quality unlike any natural speaking voice. It was impossible for Deker to recognize it. It wasted no time, but came directly to the point.

"Deker, listen careful. There's a train pulling out of Hagarton for New York at half past twelve today. You have plenty time to pack up and get your things straightened out and easily catch the train. When you get to the depot stop at the ticket office and you'll find a chair reservation held in your name."

"That's all most thoughtful," replied Deker. "But why should I go to New York?"

"You know why, Deker," assured the voice. "Things are happening in Hagarton right now and if you're around some of them are going to happen to you."

"My curiosity is aroused," said Deker, grinning. "I couldn't possibly leave town with so much going on."

"You'll leave town sooner or later, Deker," promised the voice. "Feet first, or on a train bound for the death house at Raeburn. You got a chance up to twelve-thirty today. If you're still in town this afternoon, you're going on the spot. That's a final warning. Take it or leave it—you know what it's worth!" There was a click, and then a silence.

During the ride downtown in a taxi Deker sat leaning forward on his stick with a subdued light of anticipation in his eyes. Twice before there had been occasions when word had come to him summarily ordering him from town. And twice before Deker had remained. A third time? Deker grinned, and his white teeth showed between his thin lips.

THE METROPOLE was Hagarton's leading hotel, situated at River Street and West Main, overlooking the Shongahela. It boasted a sumptuous lobby, all brown and red and gold. Deker walked through the doors after answering the deferential greeting of the taxi starter, and looked about the floor. Billy Flood was not in sight. A bellhop hastened up.

"Mr. Deker! Are you calling on Mr. Flood?"

"Yes."

"He's in his room. He told me to watch for you. You're to go right up. Room 812—on the eighth floor."

Deker gave the boy a quarter and entered an elevator.

Flood's voice bade him enter when Deker knocked on the door of Room 812. Flood had his coat off and was hard at work, seated at a desk over which was spread a litter of papers. The bed was made and the room looked fresh and clean. It was impossible to say whether or not Flood had been there all night.

"Deker," said Flood, coming abruptly to the point when the greetings were disposed of, "you have a paper authorizing you to collect a gambling debt for Danny Shane. At least, that's the story. Is it correct?"

"It is," said Deker. He seated himself in a chair by a window giving a magnificent view of the river and the valley beyond.

"Do you mind showing it to me?"

"Not at all. Only I haven't got it with me. Otis Pladwell has it. Holding it for evidence. It's worthless now, except to him."

"I see," said Flood. He thought a second or two, looking at Deker. "It establishes a motive, doesn't it?"

"It'll probably count against Danny. It could even have counted against me. Why did you want it?"

"Well, because of a matter of business. It may or may not involve you. That's what I wanted to find out."

"Shoot!"

"You took over Shane's assets, so to speak. Was it a discount deal?"

"How do you mean?"

"Did you buy that bet? Did you give Shane money?"

Deker hesitated, studying the opaque,

steady eyes of the man before him.

"No, I did not," he said. "It was a personal transaction between friends with no money exchanged."

Flood nodded, expressionless.

"Just why do you ask me this?" Deker asked.

Flood smiled, and shrugged.

"For a simple reason. Shane is in jail on a charge of murder. I want to protect Jake Howell's interests. He holds Shane's note for three thousand."

Deker grinned.

"Looks like you're stuck, doesn't it?"

"Oh, no," said Flood, sitting back in the chair. "Not necessarily. There's still the cab business, remember."

"Yeah," drawled Deker. "That's right, there is."

They talked for a few minutes longer about the night before, but Deker knew that his visit was ended. Flood had the information he wanted; if it were disappointing there was no sign. Deker soon departed. He stood for a second in the doorway on his way out, looking at the man at the desk. Billy Flood was an implacable sort of individual, an admirable foil for his employer. Howell advanced the Howell interests, and Flood, benefiting thereby, protected them, vigilantly and ruthlessly. One was popular and enjoyed a reputation for generosity; the other was not and was coldly indifferent to the fact. Deker could appreciate Danny Shane's perturbation.

It was well past midmorning. Deker glanced at the golden clock in the lobby, and walked from the Metropole to the public square. There he bent his steps toward the city hall. He walked behind the great red brick building and up the steps of police headquarters in the rear.

A policeman on house duty sent his name in to the chief, and Deker was promptly admitted to Tim Masterson's office. Masterson, too, had been up all night; he was tired but his professional heartiness was undiminished.

"Back again so soon, Deker?" he said, extending a hand. "You're rushing things, aren't you?"

"Hardly," said Deker, sitting on the arm of a chair. "You can't keep me out indefinitely."

"I told you you could see Shane when he comes through with a story that makes sense. I'm in no hurry."

"But I am, Tim. I mixed up in this, don't forget. Judge Benson is sitting today. Want me to get a writ?"

Masterson laughed.

"Hell, don't bother. We'll have to take him up for his hearing soon anyway. We'll go down and see how he's getting along."

Deker smiled as Masterson talked briefly into a telephone. The chief then led the way from the office. They descended to the basement of the building, were admitted through an iron grille gate to the cell block, and walked along the dungeon-like corridor. Prisoners peered curiously at them from the cell doors. Behind one set of bars stood Danny Shane.

"Hello, John," he said eagerly. "Has that hunk o' tripe been working on you too?" He looked defiantly at the chief of police. "Hello, you big cheese, how many murders you solved this morning?"

"One," said Masterson, unruffled. "I'm satisfied."

"I tried to get in before, Danny," Deker told him. "They wouldn't let me. Did you get a lawyer?"

"Hell, no! They won't let any one near me."

"I'll see to that. And now tell me what the devil happened to you last night."

Masterson stood by, a tight, cunning smile on his face, listening. He did not offer to open the cell door.

"I waited in your place," Danny explained, "until after half past one. Then the phone rang, and a guy asks for you. I says you're not in. He asks me can I get in touch with you in a hurry. I says I can try. So he spills a story. It's short, but it says plenty. Something's up, and you're supposed to be at Maple and Bolton at two o'clock.

I'm to get hold of you and keep you away at any cost. You're to go some place where there's a crowd, and stick by them—all night if necessary. He said you'd probably know when it was all right to go home."

"Who was talking?" Deker demanded.

"Search me! He wouldn't say. He just told me to take it on the lam as fast as I could before it was too late. I tried to keep him talking till I could get something on him, but he hung up. So I took one quick look at the clock and scrammed. It was too late to look for you around the square. There wasn't a cab in sight, so I headed for the river at a run, thinking I could head you off there. When I got near the corner of Maple and Bolton I saw you and a cop in a flivver talking. Not knowing just what was up, I lay low. Next thing you two found Russell behind the shanty and then drove to a police box.

"I figured I was too late. I didn't know just what was going on, but it looked plenty bad. There wasn't anything to do but stay laying low. I hung around an alley till the gang came and took you all away, and then started back downtown. I hadn't hardly taken a step when they jumped me. And here I am, and the damn fools are trying to get me to tell how I bumped off Frankie Russell."

"Would you know that voice again?" asked Deker. "Ever hear it before?"

"I can't remember," Danny said, troubled. "Seems I might have, but it ain't familiar."

"Disguised," said Deker. "I had another call this morning." He turned to Masterson, and the two exchanged stares, bland and challenging. "Well," asked Deker, "does that click or doesn't it?"

Masterson grunted.

"They always click," he said. "It never fails."

"John," said Danny Shane. He spoke quietly, soberly. He hesitated. "They're not going to rig me on this, are they, John?"

Deker looked at him a moment, and then shook his head.

"No, Danny, they're not," he said decisively. "I'll be seeing you again." He turned away. "Come on, Chief. This'll do for the present."

They walked up the corridor to the grille gate.

"Tim," Deker said suddenly as they were parting at headquarters door, "what do you know about Russell's trip to Havana? What did he go for?"

"A vacation, more or less," said Masterson. "So I understand."

"How much money did he lose at the Havana track?"

"That I don't know. Nobody does. But we found out that he drew five thousand dollars from the Hagarton Bank the day before he left."

"Five grand, eh?" Deker looked at the chief. "Well, I'll be seeing you soon again. I'm not going to let you keep Danny very long down there. Be good to him!"

"You bet!" said the chief, grinning.

He was a good policeman; experience made up for what he lacked in imagination, and practical self-interest saved him from being entangled in conflicting emotions. He was far from heartless; he simply knew his job and did it as well as his talents permitted.

DEKER went directly to the *Times-Tribune* building on the square. He entered the elevator and mounted to the third floor. There he walked past the desk where a vigilant and sharp tongued youth sat on guard, exchanging a privileged word of greeting with the youth, and on into the city room. He passed a number of desks where young men in shirt sleeves were intent over typewriters, dodged a charging copy boy, and mounted a low dais at the end of the room where, behind a large and littered desk, George Lucas, the city editor, presided. Lucas was snarling viciously into one of the several telephones on the desk, and Deker sat on

an empty chair and waited.

"'Lo, Deker," Lucas said, slamming down the receiver. "Don't mind if I seem busy. I am busy. What's on your mind?"

"Plenty," said Deker, "but I won't keep you long. Have a little story for you, if it's news. I was attacked in the alley outside Whitey's place last night by two men who tried to finish me the way Frankie got it. I beat them off. This morning I received a phone call ordering me to leave town or take the consequences. I have until the twelve-thirty New York train."

Lucas' eyes glowed. He shouted across the room, and his order brought a man on the run, pencil and paper in hand.

"Give it to Smith here," Lucas commanded. "You bet it's news."

He listened while Deker recounted the two incidents to the rewrite man. When Smith raced off to a typewriter with the story, Lucas demanded—

"What do you figure it means, Deker?"

"It means this sure, Luke—there'll be more news, and bigger news, by tomorrow morning," assured Deker. "Now favor for favor. I want some information."

"Go right ahead. What kind?"

"What do you know about Russell's trip to Havana?"

Lucas reflected quickly.

"Not much. I thought of following that up, and tipped off the Universal Press to dig up what they could in Havana about him. Their man couldn't locate much. He's said to have dropped twenty grand at the track and to have hocked some jewelry to get home."

"Twenty grand," said Deker. "I suppose you know that his bank withdrawal the day before he left was five thousand?"

"Where'd you get that?"

"From Tim Masterson."

"Ha!" said Lucas. "I begin to detect the odor of ripe fish."

"So do I," said Deker. He got up. "Maybe you better station a man at the city morgue the next twenty-four hours, Luke. I'm not taking that New York train—and you never can tell!"

"I'll give you a swell obit, John." Lucas grinned. "Don't forget us with the later details of this story. I'll smear it over the whole front page."

Deker promised, and departed. He hastened. In his mind, in orderly array, a whole series of facts of the utmost significance were beginning to crystallize. He glanced at his watch. It was 11:15. There was still an hour and a quarter left of his period of grace. And there was still one important avenue of investigation left unexplored. Deker grinned to himself as he strode through the late morning throng of shoppers on the square in search of Whitey Slovak.

DEKER walked to the small alley where he had fought off his unknown assailants the night before and turned in at the recessed door. He pushed it open and entered. It was an establishment like Dan O'Farrell's, the difference between them being best described as that between an old fashioned saloon and a speakeasy. This was a speakeasy, discreet, disguised and slightly sinister. It was an important one. It was Whitey Slovak's hangout, and by inference his property.

Pete was behind the bar, a big, large boned, amiable young man of Whitey's home neighborhood. He grinned at sight of Deker and offered a drink on the house by way of apology for the incident of the preceding evening.

"Is Whitey here now?" Deker asked.

"No, he ain't, Deker."

"Where can I find him?"

Pete shrugged.

"I dunno. If you want to leave a message for him I'll see he gets it."

Deker reflected.

"Get in touch with him," he instructed, "and tell him I'll be at the Club for the next hour or so. I must see him."

"O. K." A gleam of curiosity entered Pete's gaze. "What happened outside last night, Deker?" he asked.

Deker studied that broad, good natured face.

"Don't you know?"

"Hell, no. I didn't dare look outside till a long time after that shot went off. Then there wasn't a soul outside."

"Somebody tried to get me," said Deker. "I got rid of them with that one shot."

"Who was it?" asked Pete, fascinated.

"That," said Deker, "will have to wait till later." He left Pete ignorant of whether the identity of the assailants was known. "Pass the word to Whitey for me, and tell him I'm in a hurry."

"O. K," said Pete.

He was reluctant to drop the conversation so soon, but Deker departed without enlightening him further.

THE Club was an old fashioned, spacious house on a side street off East Main, in its day one of the town's most luxurious dwellings. It boasted a wide lawn, a comfortable porch that rambled halfway around the house, and great, high ceilinged rooms within. Here the political strength of Hagarton had had its focal point for a generation. Here Matt Regan had directed Hagarton affairs, seated at a desk in a private office or lounging about the Club with a cigar clenched arrogantly between strong teeth. The presidency of the Club was purely honorary; Regan had never held an office of any kind. The machinery of the organization still functioned, but in a routine way. The guiding hand of the master was gone, and another had not yet come forth to replace it.

Deker strolled restively through the empty corridors and rooms. Few were about at this hour. He had left word with the telephone operator to summon him immediately if there was a call. Idleness chafed him, but he knew this was the surest way of locating Whitey.

A man descended the stairs out in the main hall. Deker watched through a doorway in idle curiosity. Then, when he saw who it was, he started forward. Howell was heading for the street door, his heavy stick swinging in his hand.

"Jake! Just a minute. I didn't know you were here. I'd like to talk to you a minute."

Jake Howell stopped and looked at Deker in mild surprise.

"Well," he said, "good morning! And congratulations. You were sort of in a jam last night, weren't you?"

"I sure was."

"I heard about it while I was playing poker upstairs. The news broke up the game. I never knew there was anybody in Hagarton important enough to break up a game here."

Deker smiled dryly.

"Frankie Russell's importance is going to surprise a lot of people," he said. "But that will come later. I wanted to talk to you about Danny Shane. Billy Flood tells me you have his note for three thousand."

"Yes, so I have." Howell frowned judiciously.

"I suppose Flood has been taking care of the matter. I simply wanted to point out that Danny is in a bad spot, and situated where he can appreciate a little extra consideration. He's been expanding his business, and doing very well. But he is short of cash."

"So I gathered," Howell said understandingly.

"Now Danny Shane is square," said Deker. "He's one man in this town who can be counted on. You need never worry about that three thousand, and it's as good an investment now as it ever was. If he asks for an extension on that note, why not give it to him?"

Howell shrugged slowly.

"I don't mind. Naturally, I keep business and friendship separate, but I imagine it can be done on a business basis. I'll see what Flood has to say. It's been in his hands, of course."

"You know what Flood will say," Deker told him evenly. "I'd like to hear

you say something."

Howell looked at Deker, and then laughed with genial humor, pressing Deker's arm.

"I know how you feel, John," he said. "But you needn't worry about Shane. I'll see that he gets a break. I'm glad you spoke to me."

Deker smiled in response to the other's humor. But it was not a smile of gullibility. Howell evaded a direct response to Deker's request, and Deker knew he had got as much out of the man as could be had. Jake Howell was all Hagarton's friend, but Jake Howell had not attained to wealth and power by handing out promiscuous favors. There was, inevitably, calculation behind those he granted—and a patronizing manner. It was present now, and Deker smiled.

They were still talking casually in the corridor when a dapper young man walked in the door. He promptly approached Deker and stood waiting, his bland eyes looking from one to the other of the two men.

"Yes?" said Deker. "Want something?"

"You're Deker, ain't you?" asked the young man.

"I am."

"Got a car outside," said the other curtly. "You were asking to see somebody a little while ago. I'll take you to him."

Deker looked closely at the young man and glanced outside the door. Then he shook hands with Howell, urged him to act on his request, and walked outside. The messenger followed and led him to a fast little sedan parked at the curb.

The young man took Deker, driving swiftly and silently, through the town and into the section of mean, drab streets on the South Side near the river. They rode past humming factories and gaunt, lifeless warehouses, and at length pulled up in a tiny alley behind one of the latter. It was an ancient brick building three stories high. The front door was boarded up and here and there a broken window pane advertised dark emptiness within. The building had every appearance of being abandoned.

The young man stopped the motor and, bidding Deker follow, sprang out and up a short flight of steps to a ramshackle door. Deker followed, scrutinizing everything about. The door opened readily, and they passed inside.

They followed a hallway which seemed of more recent construction than the remainder of the building. It led to a door with a bright lock above the doorknob. The guide knocked, and presently the door opened. Another young man peered at them.

"Whitey in his office?" asked Deker's guide.

"Yeah," said the other. He held open the door. "Waiting for you."

"Right ahead," said the guide. "Go through that open door over there."

Deker walked across the spacious floor. It was dim and obscure, but a glance told him all that was necessary. Two medium sized trucks with panel bodies rested in the center of the floor, on their sides the names of a laundry and bakery which Deker knew to be fictitious. Against one wall were stacked boxes, cases, packages and bales. Their nature could not possibly be in doubt, though elsewhere many of this miscellaneous array might pass for almost anything. The disguises of bootlegging are devious.

In the corner to which he was directed an office had been walled off. Whitey Slovak was seated at a small desk within, making entries in a book resembling a ledger. He looked up at Deker, thrust a blotter in the book, closed it and placed it in a safe beside the desk.

"Come right in, Deker," he invited. "Take a chair. I hear you want to see me."

Deker accepted the invitation, seating himself so that he faced Whitey across the desk. He slid down comfortably in the chair after placing hat and stick on a nearby table. He hooked his thumbs in trousers pockets and gave Whitey his smiling scrutiny, cool and calculating.

"Yes, I wanted to see you, Whitey. For one thing, I wanted to ask why I was locked out last night."

WHITEY smiled, baring his strong teeth. He was a lean, strong blond man with ruthless blue eyes and pale flat lips. There was always about him an air of vigilance, of passions warily held in check, of impatience with nonessentials. Slovak had not climbed his harried way to success without a very cold and very practical viewpoint on life and all life's values. He was less vain than Marsilio and more reliable, once committed to a course that was of his own selection. But he was nobody's fool, ever.

"Now I wasn't at the place, John, you know that," he protested. There was the faintest touch of irony in his tone. "Pete told me about it this morning. I was sorry that happened."

"Nevertheless," said Deker, "when anything breaks in this town I'll always know where to look for Whitey Slovak—right in his own place where his lieutenants can get in quick touch with him for orders."

"I was playing cards at the Club last night," assured Whitey, still smiling.

"Yeah. I killed Frankie Russell last night too. Hear about it?"

"Rumors. Here and there. Pete told me something else about last night too. He said there was a shot out in the alley right after you tried to get in. What happened?"

Deker dryly gave him an account of the battle in the alley. On its completion he looked at Whitey quizzically.

"But never mind that, Whitey. What I want to ask you is this. Who was it actually killed Frankie Russell?"

Slovak shrugged as though the matter were of no interest whatever. He poured two drinks from a bottle on the desk.

"Ask Tim Masterson. He handles questions like that. I only sell liquor for a living."

Deker sipped at his glass, looked at it in the light, then drank it down.

"Whitey, there was a bruise on the side of Frankie Russell's jaw when they picked him up."

"Yeah?" said Whitey. He closed the safe door and spun the dial.

"Fact. How's Smoke Fallon's hand this morning?"

Slovak turned suddenly and looked at his visitor intently.

"What's the matter with Smoke's hand?"

"That's what I'm asking. I just wondered. I left that out of my story last night—for reasons. I also left out your last words with Frankie Russell. You mentioned things about 'being muscled outa this world', if you recall, and told him 'maybe it won't be long.' That would have looked nice in this morning's papers, wouldn't it?"

Slowly Slovak turned, his eyes fixed on Deker. His flat lips were drawn tightly against set teeth.

"What you been wanting to see me about, Deker?" he asked huskily.

"Who killed Frankie Russell, Whitey?" demanded Deker. "And don't go near that gun. Mine's in my hand."

"You'd never use it twice in this place."

"How about answering that question?"

"Well, suppose I did the job?"

"I'm afraid," said Deker, "you'd hang for it."

Slovak thought that over.

"No," he said, "I won't hang. And you won't tell that story. If you ever spill that story, Deker, you'll hang!"

It was Deker's turn to think it over. He finally smiled, shrugged, and placed his hands on the table, shoving over the glass.

"Pour me another shot," he requested. "We're not getting anywhere. I'll try another tack. Frankie Russell went to Havana with five thousand or so in his bankroll. He dropped twenty grand at the track there."

"That so?" said Slovak. "You been learning things, eh, Deker?"

"He was deeply in hock to Tony Marsilio yesterday," went on Deker, "and hung him up along with every one else."

"Yes? Go on."

"Suppose you go on, Whitey," suggested Deker.

"Sure. I can help you out by telling you that he tried to borrow some money from me yesterday. He wanted ten grand—imagine! He was disappointed."

"That all?"

"Sure that's all."

"Whitey," said Deker, "where did Frankie get that extra fifteen thousand?"

"That," said Whitey, leaning over the desk and pointing an incisive finger at Deker, "is something for you to find out for yourself. You have your own mess of fish to fry, Deker, and I'm not doing it for you. But you go ahead and learn where Frankie got his fifteen thousand —and maybe I'll have something just as interesting to tell you then." He slapped the desk smartly with his palm and got up.

Deker also rose from his chair.

"Is that a promise, Whitey?"

Whitey laughed, his eyes bright and hard between narrowed lids.

"It's a promise I ain't worrying much about. I know what you want, Deker, and I'm not helping you worth a damn. I'm helping Whitey Slovak—and him alone."

Deker smiled and nodded, his mouth ironically awry. Whatever Whitey knew, he was not talking. They looked at each other for a moment and neither gaze wavered. They were beginning to understand each other.

When the fast little sedan dropped Deker on the square, the great clock outside Whitehall's department store read 12:55. Deker dropped into a drug store and entered a telephone booth. He put through a call which was answered promptly by Louis at the apartment.

"I have a job for you, Louis," Deker told him. "Don't muff it. You'll have to use tact and a lot of head."

"What is it?"

"Go to the Club. Ask if I'm there, or say anything that'll serve the purpose. But get inside and buttonhole one of the waiters. They're your best bet. Slip him a twenty or so. Find out then if Whitey Slovak was at the Club playing poker last night. Get the exact time he arrived and left."

"That'll be easy. I'll get it."

"And while you're at it, get the same information on Jake Howell and Billy Flood. They were there some time last night also. And when you have it lined up, hurry back home and wait for me."

"When will you be up?"

"Don't know. But soon."

"O. K," said Louis. "There's been a call for you here, by the way."

"Yes?"

"Marge Shipman. She'd like to see you. Says she'll be home all day. She'd like you to call on her soon as you can because she'll be alone for awhile."

"All right," said Deker. "You jump on that job, and I'll be seeing you later."

Deker went from the drug store to the Hole in the Wall. Glancing inside, he was relieved to find Tony present, leaning in watchful indolence on the counter. Deker sauntered up, his eyes full of appraisal.

"Tony," he said, following the casual but guarded greetings, "you and I never got along especially well, but you hit it off fairly enough with Matt Regan, didn't you?"

"I did," said Tony. "Everybody did."

"I know. That's what makes it so hard to figure who killed him. He was a hard man, but he gave an even break for a square deal." Deker looked Tony in the eye. "Will you do something the old man would have done if he were here?"

Tony shrugged.

"Maybe. What is it?"

"Give Danny Shane a break. You can do it. I can't, because I'm mixed up in this thing."

Tony's eyes grew small and calculat-

ing.

"How would I go about it?"

"This way. Frankie Russell died at 1:45. That's pretty well established. Couldn't you have a couple of your boys—say a couple on a beer delivery and wary about testifying without protection—say that they saw Shane either leaving my place or on the way to Maple and Bolton at 1:50. That would kill any case against Danny outright."

"A little friendly perjury, eh?"

"Just that. Frankie was framed, I was framed, and Danny ran smack into a frameup. Another little one won't matter much."

Tony selected a cigar from a box nearby and lighted it with care. He puffed on it, rolled it across his mouth and gazed at the ceiling with one eye. He rather enjoyed the moment.

"Well," he said, "I'll tell you, Deker—"

He was interrupted by a voice beside them. Deker glanced about, and slowly uttered an oath. The newcomer was Danny Shane, grinning from ear to ear and a-quiver with relief.

"Boy, I made it!" he declared. "They let me go—walk out—scram. I'm in the clear."

"How?" snapped Deker.

"I got an alibi. You know that beanery at Maple and Frémont? The proprietor came in and said he saw me traveling fast down Maple Street at seven minutes of two this morning. That meant I never had time to do the killing. It blew the rest of their case sky high."

Deker looked at Marsilio. The latter returned the look with inscrutable gaze.

"So they beat me to it, eh?" said Deker.

"So it seems, my friend."

Deker cursed softly and with feeling.

"I know what that means," he said. "It's half an hour past my deadline. And that restaurant, for as long as I've known it, has closed every night at half past twelve." He abruptly started for the door. "Come along, Danny. I have things to do in a hurry."

Shane cast a puzzled, questioning look at Marsilio, and then hastened after Deker.

ON THEIR way out to Deker's apartment in a cab, Danny Shane found opportunity to question Deker regarding his sudden haste. Deker explained, telling Shane of his telephoned warning that morning.

"If that alibi of yours hadn't fallen so pat," Deker explained, "I might not have thought to question it. But I hit on the same idea myself, and was just working up a little cooperation for it. When they arrested you, Danny, they got the wrong man. I was supposed to be the victim. It seems very necessary that I be put out of the way before these killers can go ahead with their plans. They know damn well that I'm not easy to get rid of, and their frameup was a clever way out. But somebody threw a monkey wrench into the works by phoning me and getting you to rush into the situation. Now they've straightened it out. I'm cornered and stand a pretty fair chance of conviction on circumstantial evidence. The pinch is doubtless due any minute now—and meantime the killers are hoping earnestly I'll blow town and be out of their way for good."

"Are you going to blow?" asked Danny.

"Hell, no! Just at this point? Never in your life!"

"Look here, John," said Danny, "you still have an out. How about the guy that talked to me on the phone last night? He was interested once—he ought to step in and clear you again, seeing he knows so much."

"No, Danny. Whoever that Samaritan was, his reasons were his own, private and personal. He wasn't helping me, he was confusing whoever framed me. Now they've got me again on what looks like a dead certainty, he won't dare try a second rescue. It's too late."

Danny was silent and troubled.

"What can I do, John?" he asked after a moment. "If there's any way I can help see you through—"

"You can," Deker interrupted him. "There are two jobs I want you to do. They oughtn't to take long. First go to the city hall to the bureau of records. Find out who owns the building at Maple and Frémont where that restaurant is. Then get busy and locate a black Cadillac sedan that was hired out last night somewhere in town. You know all the auto renting spots. There probably wasn't more than one Caddy rented yesterday in town. Hire it. If there are two, hire both, and park one of them in your garage. Bring the other here."

"O. K," said Danny crisply. "I'll run this cab back to the city hall. I know everybody that's in the auto renting game in this town. I'll locate that car by phone, pick it up and be right out."

The taxi drew up at Deker's door, and he promptly leaped out.

"See you later, Danny. Counting on you."

He ran inside and took the stairs three at a time.

When Louis returned from his mission he found his employer just snapping shut a Gladstone bag packed with clothing. Deker tossed the bag into the little foyer, said "Well, Louis?" and went to the corner cabinet to pour himself a brandy.

"Whitey Slovak was at the Club only for a few minutes, early in the evening. He didn't play any cards at all, and he didn't come back."

"As I thought," said Deker. "He was at his place last night and wouldn't let me in. He didn't want to see me."

"I got the other dope also," said Louis. "Howell and Flood came in about two or three minutes before two. They played poker for awhile and left after the game broke up at a quarter to three."

"A couple of minutes before two, eh? Until 2:45? Good work, Louis." Deker tossed off the drink. "I'm going to take to cover for a few days now. Shane has been turned loose on a phony alibi, and I know I'm due to go back on that charge. I'm waiting for Danny now. You stay here and look after things until you hear from me." Deker drew a packet of bills from his pocket and thumbed three goldbacks from it. "Take these for emergency. I've cleaned out the cash reserve in the wall safe and left it open. If the cops come let them have the run of the place."

The buzzer sounded in the foyer. It was from the landing outside, not from the street door. Deker thrust the bills into his pocket.

"Got your automatic?"

"Right here," said Louis.

"Good. Answer that. If it's Danny, all right. If it's the cops, let them in and then go make a few noises in the kitchen. We'll be talking awhile. You slide up behind that curtain and be ready to back my play."

Louis nodded and went to the door.

It was not Danny. It was Tim Masterson and, behind him, Detective Chonsky. They forced the door wide open without giving Louis a second glance, and walked through into the living room. Then they stopped, to look at Deker seated comfortably across the room with a book half open in his hand.

Deker raised his eyebrows in mild surprise. He did not rise.

"Well," he said, "visitors! Official or otherwise?"

Masterson smiled and nodded his head.

"Very official, Deker."

"That so? On what sort of errand?"

"I guess you know well enough. There's been a slip-up. I want you again in connection with the murder of Frankie Russell."

Deker was bored.

"You might spare your friends this endless ordeal, Tim. How does the charge read now? What are the grounds of arrest this time?"

Masterson was in no hurry. He

walked to the open cabinet, poured himself a drink and grinned at Deker. He dropped into a chair.

"If you're so surely in the clear, John, why worry about a little thing like an arrest? Nothing will happen to you."

"No?" Deker smiled faintly. "I know this town better than that, Tim."

"Well, it's this way," said the chief. "You had a motive. You told Marsilio you were looking for Russell to collect three grand he was welching on. You as much as said plainly you had ways and means of collecting without fail. You quarreled with Frankie when you met him and in front of two witnesses you threatened him. A little later you were found in the vicinity of his dead body. It all sort of hangs together, you see."

"Yes, I see. Who were those two witnesses?"

"Jake Howell and Billy Flood. We've been working on this case, John. I'm sorry for you, but the indictment will probably read first degree murder with premeditation pretty clearly established."

"Let me ask you a question, Tim," Deker said. He leaned forward in the chair, two fingers still holding his place in the book he had been reading. "Who's going to be the next boss of Hagarton?"

"I don't know," admitted Masterson. "Maybe Whitey. Maybe Marsilio. They're both pretty powerful in their own neighborhoods."

"You're anxious to stand in with whoever makes the grade, aren't you? Would you arrest either of them despite that if a case of murder were made out against him?"

"I sure would!" Masterson said deliberately. He looked at Deker and his eyes twinkled shrewdly. "Because then he'd no longer be boss of Hagarton, John."

"Fine!" said Deker. "That's all I wanted to know. Now both you gentlemen will kindly elevate your hands. There's a fast little automatic pointing your way between the pages of this book and the safety catch is off. Louis, come in and relieve my guests of their embarrassment. Get their guns so they can lower their arms."

Smiling, his eyes aglint with appreciation, Louis glided into the room and expertly disarmed the two officers. They were furious but they offered no overt resistance.

"John Deker!" Masterson exploded. His face was red with holding himself in. "I'll crucify you if you pull anything now! Put up that gun and come with us quietly."

"Oh, no," Deker protested mockingly. "Couldn't possibly. Sorry."

Masterson's hands gripped the arms of his chair.

"You know what this means. Put it up, I say!"

"Quite out of the question, Tim. Things to do. You must understand."

Grinning, Deker went to the window and looked out. Louis stood behind the officers, his eyes like gimlets, the automatic in his hand.

"What luck!" murmured Deker from the window. He came away pocketing his gun. He picked up his hat and stick from the table. "And now for awhile, Tim, farewell and good luck. Next time I see you perhaps we can settle between us the question of Hagarton's next boss. Or perhaps I should put it, who will not be Hagarton's boss. Louis will entertain you here for a little longer and then you can go. If you're wise you'll do nothing to Louis about this. Hagarton would give a good deal for a real laugh like this, and I know you don't like being laughed at."

"John Deker—" began Masterson.

"Tell it to me later," said Deker. He was gone, snatching up the bag as he went, slamming the door behind him.

ON THE street below, Danny Shane was just coming out from behind the wheel of a sleek black Cadillac sedan.

"Right back there, Danny!" Deker

ordered. He slung the bag into the rear and joined Shane in the front seat. "Step on it. Get away from here fast as you can and turn at the next corner."

Shane obeyed without asking questions. The big car shot away like a rocket and careened about at the next corner without abating speed. Danny turned loose the great reserve of power that lay beneath the hood, and the car streaked along between the quiet homes of Alder Avenue.

"All right, boy, take it easy now," Deker said. "I was chiefly interested in the getaway. I left Masterson and another dick up in my rooms with Louis in charge. They'll be detained awhile, so we're safe enough. What did you find?"

"This is the boat," said Danny. "It was rented yesterday afternoon. Billy Flood took it."

"Flood?" said Deker. "Was this the only one out yesterday?"

"It was. Buck Newell owns it. He said Jake Howell's chauffeur drove it in this morning and that he remarked Flood hadn't used it after all. He said Flood rents it now and then when he drives some jane or other up to the Castles Roadhouse in the hills, on nights when Jake don't need him."

"How about the restaurant?"

"Oh, that was easy. Howell owns half the South Side. That restaurant building is his. So is your apartment building, for that matter. The holding company you pay rent to is his. I even looked up that site where the new factory's going up and where you found Frankie, and that ground belongs to him."

"All of which is not exactly surprising," admitted Deker. "Though it's still interesting. Well, we'll see."

"Where to now?" asked Danny.

"Drive down North River. I want to stop at Marge Shipman's and find out what's on her mind. If I could get her to talk this case would be closed by midnight. Marge is too clever a girl to ignore—especially right now, Danny."

Danny grinned, said "O. K." and cut the wheel to head for North River Street.

There was warmth in Marge Shipman's welcome when she opened the door to Deker. She invited him inside and took his hat and stick with the air of an old friend. Danny remained outside in the car.

"I can't stop for long, Marge," Deker told her. "I'm on the lam, more or less. Masterson's hit the trail for me."

Marge was surprised at the news.

"Really? But I thought Danny Shane—"

"He's out there in the car. They turned him loose and want me instead."

"So!" said Marge, considering this shift of events.

She tapped her cheek thoughtfully with a polished fingernail and led the way to the dining room. There she invited Deker to take a chair and pushed toward him the tray with bottle and glasses. She sat down nearby and looked at him. Her first question came right to the point.

"John, do you think Tony killed Frankie Russell?" she asked.

"Are you asking that to reassure yourself, Marge, or to find out my opinion?"

"Your opinion. I want to know."

"If I thought Tony killed Frankie Russell, is it likely I'd tell you all about it?" asked Deker, smiling at her.

She made a baffled gesture of impatience. Then she laughed ruefully.

"You're a queer bird, John. If you were another man I'd say sure you'd tell me all about it. Women have managed that before, for all the fine things men think of themselves. I'm being frank with you. I'm not trying to work on you because I don't think it would do any good. I know you too well. You're smooth—but you're hardboiled."

"Thank you," said Deker. "That's a compliment."

"I'm going to tell you something," she said. "Maybe you know more than I do, though. It's about Frankie's trip

to Havana."

"Go ahead," said Deker. "Never mind what I know."

She looked at him, then suddenly got up and came close. She stood above him.

"John Deker, I hope I'm not getting into trouble. But I'm afraid of you sometimes."

"You mean you're afraid for Tony?"

"Well, yes. Tony don't tell me everything, not by a long shot. Sometimes he don't have to. There isn't much goes on in Hagarton I miss. I know Tony—a lot better than you do. He didn't kill Frankie. You know that, don't you?"

Deker looked at her and did not answer.

"He didn't do it, John," she went on. "You and Tony don't waste any love on each other, but I want you to know that. Tony don't like you because he can't understand you and he's afraid you blame him for Matt Regan's murder. He's afraid because he feels you'd frame him or even bump him off if you once felt sure he killed Matt."

"And that's the only reason?"

"It's enough, isn't it?"

"No," said Deker. "Tony may be a good guy to you, Marge, but he's just another wop to me. Don't try to dress him up as a choir boy to me. Tony is just now afflicted with the bug called ambition. He'd like to step into Matt's place. He knows he can't because I won't let him. Therefore he can't stand the sight of me."

"You're right," she admitted. "Tony don't realize it, but I wouldn't let him either. I've been afraid of that. If Tony or Whitey or any of the racket crowd try to get control here it means a war with the others sure. It means that Tony would have to take over Whitey's liquor trade or that Whitey would have to muscle in on Tony's business. That's what has always happened when alcohol and politics mix. Regan was stronger than any of them, and he kept them all in line; but now there's nobody strong enough to run things that way. Anybody trying it will have to lick the others first or the others will lick him to save their own skins."

"You've got it sized up pretty accurately, Marge," Deker said with an admiring smile. "Whitey is willing to let things run as they are, I think, but he'll never stand for Tony telling him where to get off. Tim Masterson won't want either of them giving orders when it's so comfortable to deal with both separately. Jake Howell will fight tooth and nail to break any power that threatens to dicker with the labor leaders as has happened in many other towns. Everybody involved has his own ax to grind and is on the anxious seat. There's millions in the clean-up for the man who could take over all the rackets and run them his own way, and millions don't usually lie around long without somebody claiming them."

"The trouble is," Marge said dryly, "that those millions have a string attached to them—machine guns. I don't like machine guns and never have. And if I have anything to say Tony isn't going to either. That's why I wanted to see you. I want you to lay off Tony. Leave him out of it and I'll help you."

"How?"

She looked at him a moment, studying him, making certain of him.

"I can tell you something," she said. "It's talk that's been quietly circulating that Tony picked up. It's about Frankie's trip to Havana, and you can have it for what it's worth. Frankie Russell, the dope reads, went down there to pay off the two men who killed Matt Regan."

Deker's eyebrows arched.

"Oh, yeah?" he said slowly.

"And he lost the pay-off money at the tracks and never delivered it."

"For which he found himself on the spot. It clicks." Deker reflected a moment. "The poor damn fool! He heard what he knew was a death warrant read to him over the phone and

he walked out to it without saying a word. I sat there and despised him and showed it plainly, and he walked out promising to be back."

"Knowing he wouldn't?"

"Certainly. There was nothing else to do. He played with the idea of squealing for a moment, thinking he might bargain for his life somehow with me, and he turned it down."

They were silent. Then she placed a hand gently on his shoulder.

"John, you're not so hardboiled. Not you, beneath the shell." She told him softly, "John Deker, I like you—a lot."

"Hm. Suppose then, Marge, you tell me who sent Frankie Russell down to Havana with fifteen thousand dollars of a pay-off?" Deker's voice was bland and friendly and perfectly cool.

"*So!*" exploded a voice from the door leading to the kitchen.

Marge whirled about with a gasp. Deker did not move. In the doorway stood Tony Marsilio, huge and passionate and menacing. In his hand was a revolver. He came into the room, and Marge backed away against a wall.

"What are you doing here?" Tony demanded of Deker.

"Right this minute?" said Deker. "Showing a hell of a lot more sense than you, Tony, for one thing."

"To hell with sense!" shouted Tony. "You're a rat, Deker. You're going around talking about me and Frankie Russell. You come here when I'm not around and talk to Marge. Lucky I come in the back way this time. She 'likes' you, eh, Deker?"

"Don't be such a damn fool, Tony," Deker said shortly.

His eyes were cold. He got up easily and reached for his hat and stick lying on the couch.

"I am the damn fool, eh?" demanded Marsilio. "Well, we'll see. We'll see! By—"

Deker's stick hummed through the air and struck the hand holding the revolver. The paralyzed fingers lost their grip and the weapon fell. Tony's other hand swooped like a hawk and caught it before it reached the floor. Deker, meantime, had drawn his own gun. The two men confronted each other over the table with their guns trained on each other.

"Tony!" said Marge hysterically. "Tony, for heaven's sake! Can't you see? I was trying to get him to talk." She ran to Tony and pulled at him. "Put away that gun. I asked him here because I had to find out. I was getting him to talk, Tony!"

"To talk, eh?"

"Yes!" she said.

Marsilio looked at her, his eyes small in his large face. She pleaded with him. He wavered, inevitably. He did not relent toward Deker, but he heeded her plea. He grunted, suddenly put away the gun and placed his hand on her shoulder.

Deker slid his automatic into his holster, watching them. He smiled faintly, understandingly, and started from the room quietly. In the doorway he paused to look back. He saw Marge's face over Tony's shoulder, and in her eyes, meeting his, was an expression of secret triumph. Deker shrugged and continued out of the room.

Seated in the car, Deker snorted to himself in sudden amusement.

"What's that?" inquired Danny.

"I said let's get away from here," said Deker. "Fast!"

THE two men spent the remainder of the afternoon in a spacious furnished room in South River street. Danny engaged the room and let Deker in when the landlady had vanished to another part of the house. They found no tedium in the passing hours, for each slept the sound sleep of exhaustion, one on the bed, the other on a couch beside tall windows overlooking the river.

They were up with the late dusk and out with the coming of darkness. Danny drove the car through back streets, and they ate a hasty meal in a small

restaurant in an unfrequented part of town. Following this Deker directed Shane to stop at a cigar store where he led the little man to the privacy of a telephone booth.

"Call up Jake Howell's home," Deker ordered. "See if he's in. If not, find out where he is. If you get him, make an urgent appointment with him somewhere in town in fifteen minutes. I want to make certain he's out of the house during the next half hour."

Danny followed these orders. His conversation was brief, and his subsequent report satisfying to Deker.

"Ain't home," said Danny. "Left this afternoon late, and said he was gone for the day. I talked to that combination butler and chauffeur of his."

"Not home?" repeated Deker. "Fine. Then we'll go calling on him."

Deker had Danny stop the car beneath the trees several doors from Jake Howell's home. Jake occupied an old fashioned, dignified sandstone house set back on a lawn in the shadows of two stately elms. Pennyfield Avenue had been populated by the élite of Hagarton for two generations, and Jake, though a bachelor, had decided five years before to live up to his growing position by making his residence among them.

Deker studied the house for a moment before approaching it. Lights were burning in the rear, but the rest of the house was obviously unoccupied.

"Jake's man Frederick must be in the back with the cook and housekeeper," Deker concluded. "Danny, I'm going to the front door, and you'll have to gumshoe around to the kitchen. I want you to lay low, but to start something back there which will leave me free at the front. Now fade in among these trees, give me five minutes, and then cut loose."

"O. K," said Danny. He disappeared silently among the shadows.

Deker pressed the button beside Howell's front door, and a bell rang softly somewhere in the rear. In a moment the door opened, and Frederick, tall, impassive and obsequious, looked out at him.

"Is Mr. Howell home?" Deker asked.

"No, sir. He is not in just now. He is not expected back till late."

"Any way of getting in touch with him, Frederick?"

"No, sir. Not that I know of."

"Hm. Do you think I might run into him if I looked about downtown? Has he definite plans for this evening?"

Frederick hesitated.

"I doubt that you would find him, sir. But I can't say anything about his plans."

There came a sound of crashing glass from the rear of the house, and immediately the frightened scream of a woman. Frederick turned like a released spring and stood tensely listening.

"Excuse me, sir!" he said, and ran back through the hall to vanish in a darkened doorway.

Deker entered the hall. He closed the door softly after him and sprang to the stairs leading to the upper floors. He ran lightly up the steps and, at the landing above, struck a match. He had a slight knowledge of the house from previous casual visits, and he walked straight forward into a room which he knew to be Howell's bedroom. Moving swiftly, he closed the door, drew the window shades and turned on the light.

Deker had his purpose well in mind. He strode to a clothes closet and looked within. In a deep corner of the closet a small rack held erect an assortment of walking sticks. Deker began drawing them one by one from the rack and examining them closely. He submitted them all to the same scrutiny, and then left them as they were. He smiled, and it was a smile of contentment.

Next Deker looked about the room for a moment and, failing in his search, walked into the bathroom adjoining. Here he came upon a hamper for soiled clothes. He dumped its contents on the floor, scattering the garments with one

foot. He did not find what he sought, and left them there. He went directly to a dresser against one wall and pulled open the drawers one after the other. From one he took a handkerchief after examining it with a frown of uncertainty.

A faint noise caused Deker to look up from the handkerchief into the dresser mirror directly in front of him. The door was slowly moving open. Deker watched it for a long second. Frederick's baleful face peered into the room through the opening, and in Frederick's hand was a gun. There could be no doubting Frederick's ability and entire willingness to use his weapon to the fullest advantage. His eyes were hot with rage.

Deker turned casually from the dresser, his back full to the door. He snapped the handkerchief in the air a couple of times, unfolding it. Gathering it casually into a crumpled ball, he reached back to thrust it into his rear pocket. Then he swung on an instant pivot, and the automatic flashed up in his hand to bear on the vigilant man in the door.

Both guns barked at once, stunningly. Frederick lurched and stumbled against the door, throwing it wide open. Deker stood still. In the mirror behind him there was a small, round hole.

"Come on in, Frederick," he invited huskily.

Frederick dropped the revolver, unable to hold it. His right arm hung limply at his side while the left clung to the edge of the door. His face was white and his teeth were set as he stared at Deker. His gaze fell to the gun in Deker's hand and he moved into the room from the door.

"Frederick!" cried a scared feminine voice from below. "Frederick, what's happened? Where are you?"

"Answer her!" snapped Deker. "Talk to her."

Frederick hesitated, but not for long.

"All right, Martha," he called. "Nothing happened. I'll be right down."

"Oh," said the voice in relief, and remained silent thereafter.

"What do you want here, Deker?" Frederick demanded tensely.

Deker smiled and walked over to the door. He picked up the revolver and dropped it into his pocket. Then he swung a chair forward into the center of the floor.

"Sit down," he ordered. "Sorry I had give it to you, but there seemed to be little choice. You can count yourself lucky that I made a bull's-eye. How's the arm?"

"I think it's broken," said Frederick. He dropped sullenly into the chair, the arm dangling uselessly. "What do you want here?"

"Just a glance around Jake's room. And now that we've reached an understanding of sorts, I want to ask you a question or two." He stood before the man, studying him with penetrating gaze. "Frederick, did you drive your boss at all last night?"

"No, I didn't. He didn't use the car."

"He used Flood's rented car, didn't he?"

Frederick was wary and suddenly uneasy.

"I suppose so; I don't know. Why ask me?"

"Well, you drove the car back to the agency this morning. I thought you'd know."

"Yes," admitted Frederick. "Flood hired the car and then didn't use it as he expected. Mr. Howell wanted him on business. Flood stayed at the Metropole and Mr. Howell came home in a cab. I was sent down this morning to pick up the car where it was parked all night on the street and take it back."

"Do you usually do that?"

"No, Flood generally returns it."

"I see," said Deker, nodding. "Where are they tonight?"

"I can't say. Mr. Howell and Flood drove away late this afternoon in Mr. Howell's phaeton."

"The black Rolls?"

"Yes."

Deker walked from Frederick into the bathroom. He returned with a bunch of crumpled linen clutched in one hand and dropped it beside the chair. Next he went to the dresser and procured a couple of clean handkerchiefs.

"I can't say I'm sorry for this, since it gave me the opportunity for an illuminating little talk," Deker told Frederick with irony. "I'm sorry that I have to leave you in discomfort for awhile. But I think I can promise that it won't be long." He set to work on the man, gagging him with the handkerchiefs and binding him to the chair with securely knotted towels and shirts. "You're a little too faithful to your boss to be let loose just yet, Frederick. Loyalty is a great virtue. It gets a man into all kinds of trouble. I'm hoping for your sake that you're as innocent as you look and that your boss didn't impose on that virtue too much."

He stepped back and viewed his handiwork with satisfaction. The injured arm rested on Frederick's lap, but otherwise his limbs were solidly lashed to the chair. Above the mask made by the gag Frederick's eyes burned into Deker's.

Deker walked to the door, snapped off the lights and was gone, closing the door after him. He listened over the banister for a second, then went silently down the stairs and out the front door.

Danny Shane was waiting in the car. He held open the door, and let in the clutch as Deker stepped on the running board. In a moment they were far from the house behind the elms.

Danny chuckled.

"I near scared them women into a fit," he declared. "I busted a window with a good sized rock and you'd think I pushed the whole house over on them."

"Frederick didn't waste any time," said Deker. "He was upstairs after me in two seconds. I had to wing him and tie him up in a chair."

"Get what you went after?"

"No. But it's even better that I didn't. Wait a little and you'll see why."

They drove downtown, and Deker directed Shane to turn the car into the dark alley where Whitey Slovak made headquarters. Shane parked the car near the recessed doorway. They got out, and Deker stood for a moment viewing the sedan musingly. Danny paused to watch him.

DEKER opened the rear door of the car and looked inside. Presently he climbed within. He snapped on the dome light and looked about him, scrutinizing every inch of the interior. Then he went on his knees and began examining with sensitive fingers the flooring, the upholstery and the entire interior of the car. Danny continued to watch and refrained from interrupting with questions.

A man walked into the alley while they were thus engaged. He halted and looked toward the car, and then walked up to it. It was Whitey Slovak.

"Hello, Danny," he said. "Congrats and all that. Glad to see you."

Deker, suddenly aware of Whitey's presence, snapped out the dome light and came out of the car.

"Hello, Whitey. Just going to drop in on you. Got a few things to talk over with you."

"All right. Let's go inside." Whitey looked at Deker in the glow from the parking lights with guarded curiosity.

They stopped at the bar inside at the end farthest from the door. The few customers in the place were gathered at the other end.

"Whitey," said Deker, "how long were Jake Howell and Billy Flood here last night?"

Whitey elevated his eyebrows indifferently.

"Oh, about fifteen minutes or so. Not long. I guess they were doing the rounds before sitting in that game at the Club."

"I see," said Deker. He looked at the bead in the whisky glass before him.

"And tell me something else, Whitey. Why exactly did you call my place last night to warn me of the frameup?"

Danny Shane's head jerked aside and he stared at Slovak. His eyes came alight with recognition. Deker smiled faintly. Whitey slowly turned to look at Deker.

"What makes you think I called you last night?"

Deker laughed.

"Well, never mind if you feel that way about it, Whitey. I'm not inquisitive, just curious. And now one more favor. Go call up Tim Masterson and ask him to step over here a minute. He ought to be in his office about now."

"What the hell are you up to, Deker?" Whitey snarled. "If you think for a minute you can—"

"Easy, Whitey. You and I can do some good work together tonight." Deker met the other's hot gaze with a cool stare that was at once a warning and a reassurance. "I'm not asking you to get Tim over to arrest anybody. Get that off your mind. If anybody, he'll pinch me. He tried to, once today, and I pulled a gun on him. Satisfied? Get him on the wire and do that for me. It'll be worth your while."

Whitey Slovak considered the request some time before acceding to it. Finally he said "O. K." in an abrupt voice and walked around the partition at the end of the bar. The partition was the division between the barroom and the rear room, and the telephone booth was on the other side adjoining a row of curtained nooks where such of Whitey's trade as desired privacy might retire.

Deker grinned at Shane and winked with satisfaction.

"It *was* Whitey," said Danny. "I never thought of him."

"I wasn't sure," said Deker, "but it was one good way of finding out."

He moved his glass along the bar and stepped around the end of the mahogany counter. Between the bar end and the partition there was a two-foot passageway. He leaned on the bar so that he faced up its length, his back to the partition. Idly he lighted a cigaret and blew a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling.

"What the hell do you want Tim—" began Danny.

"Wait a minute!" Deker ordered.

He was listening intently. At the other end of the bar Pete and his customers were engaged in a low voiced conversation and they gave him no notice.

Suddenly Deker put down his glass and darted around the partition to the telephone booth. He pulled open the door, while Whitey placed a startled palm over the mouthpiece.

"Tell him to bring them over with him," ordered Deker.

"What do you mean? Bring who?"

"You know who I mean. Jake and Billy, since they're in his office now. They'll enjoy the show."

"Oh, yeah?" snarled Whitey, obviously at a loss for anything else to say.

"I've just been standing in your listening post, Whitey," Deker said rapidly. "That partition's thin, isn't it? And the booth has no back, I notice. Ask them all over." He closed the door on the scowling Whitey.

Whitey extended the desired invitation, but when he left the telephone booth he demanded an explanation for these strange proceedings. Deker suggested a little more privacy, and without a word Slovak turned and, jerking a summons with his head for them to follow, led the way from the barroom. They passed through a door in the side wall. Ascending a flight of stairs, they entered a room on the second floor. It was a barely furnished room, containing a table, a couch and a few chairs. On the table rested a bottle half full of whisky. Whitey sat down and indicated a chair for Deker.

"Suppose you come clean now, Deker," he suggested raspingly. "It's about time you did."

"Worried, Whitey?" asked Deker.

"Maybe I am."

"Well, I think your worries are over. I want Tim Masterson tonight because I'm going to let him arrest the murderer of Frankie Russell—and of Matt Regan."

The eyes of Danny Shane, seated to one side, grew suddenly wide, and as suddenly narrow. He leaned forward with bated interest. Slovak glanced at his hands, then looked up sharply.

"Who is it?"

"You know who it is, Whitey." Deker's voice was hard and challenging. "You told me today you were helping Whitey Slovak, and nobody else. It's up to you now to help him—in my way. I'm giving you a chance. If you don't take it, you're finished."

"Yeah?" snarled Whitey.

"You've been playing them close to your chest, Whitey. I understand why. You know who killed Regan and Russell, but it wasn't your job to interfere even if you could produce proof—which I suspect you couldn't. Besides, if that man came into power in Hagarton you didn't want him for an enemy. You called me without saying who you were because you were still willing to play neutral and at the same time give me a break. I'm grateful for that thought."

Whitey said nothing, waiting like a gambler for Deker to reveal his cards.

"Frankie Russell was on the run last night," said Deker. "His killers knew it. They knew I, for one, was turning the screws, and that Frankie was mighty close to pulling a squeal. He was in a panic and ready to try anything to save himself—even to spilling it all to me in exchange for protection. They had to kill him to shut his mouth, not to speak of giving him the usual dose for a welcher. Their plans for muscling into control of Hagarton were slowly going haywire, and something had to be done—in a hurry. They set their traps in a hurry. They bumped off Russell and framed me to be strung for the murder.

"I've been waiting for some one to show his hand in this town, some one anxious to fit into Matt's shoes. Everybody knows it. And they know if it was the last thing I did, I'd pass out with the satisfaction of squaring Matt's death. Well, I'm doing the squaring and I'm not passing out—tonight!"

Slovak nodded, waiting.

"Jake Howell and Billy Flood came here last night, didn't they, Whitey? They talked awhile, and then put through a phone call. You heard a little of it, didn't you. It's easy to guess. They called Frankie and picked him up in their car. Am I wrong?"

"No," Whitey admitted. "I had a feeling something was up last night, and I was watching them two. I heard a little—just a little. I heard your name and I heard mention of that factory Howell is building. They didn't talk of killing. They didn't have to. They understood each other—and I understood them. I couldn't tell from what I heard what was going to happen, but I gave you a ring just for the hell of it. I only found out when somebody walked in here last night and told us Frankie was dead and you were being held for murder. Then I knew the whole story."

"And you wouldn't let me in because you thought I was licked and Howell was at last sitting on top," said Deker.

"Hell!" Whitey exploded. "What do you think I'd do in any case like that? Play policeman? I'm running a business and I got to play ball with the main guy in this town no matter who he is. If I had Howell cold with plenty evidence maybe I might have done something about it. But if I squawked any time these months it spelled finish for me whatever way you look at it. Show me where you got Howell cold—and I'm on your side from that minute."

"Well," said Deker, "to continue with my story, they talked Frankie into phoning me and arranging a meeting. I don't know what story they told him but I believe Frankie talked to me on the level. They took him to Maple and Bolton and finished him. Maybe they didn't like to, but they had to do it. Then they came flying back downtown and went to the Club to sit in on a game

and establish an alibi. Then the game broke up, they got to thinking things over and they came here to see you and make sure you wouldn't pull a squawk. My arrival scared them off. When they found it was John Deker in that dark alley they lost their heads and tried to finish me on the spot. They failed, and after that they left their car parked downtown and wouldn't go near it."

"Sure sounds pretty, Deker," admitted Slovak, "but—you ain't got an ounce of proof."

"The best proof produced in any murder case, Whitey, is proof supplied by the killer himself. That's what we're going after tonight. With Frankie dead and those two guys probably flown from Havana by now, no one will ever be tried for the murder of Matt Regan. But I'll get them for Frankie's murder—and that will satisfy me, plenty."

There was the sound of a step in the hall outside, and the door opened. Tim Masterson, suspicious and grim, looked within and entered with deliberate tread. Behind him came Detective Chonsky.

"Hm!" said the chief of police. "I had a hunch and it was right." He looked hard at Deker, and then confronted Slovak. "What's the idea of this, Whitey? I won't cause trouble in your place if I can help it, but I want Deker—and I want an explanation!"

"Ask him for it," said Slovak. "He's full of explanations. He's got a couple lined up specially for you."

"Tim," said Deker, "I'm still in town and I have no intention of leaving. Give me a free rein till midnight and I'll give you the biggest pinch of your lifetime."

"How?" demanded Masterson.

"Sit down and let me tell you a story," said Deker. "But first, where are our other guests? What happened to Jake and Billy?"

"They couldn't come," said Masterson. "They had another date."

"To celebrate my departure from town, I guess," Deker said with a hard smile. "Take a chair and I'll tell you a thrilling little bedtime story about Brother Jake and Cousin Billy."

Grimly and deliberately the chief of police selected a chair and sat down.

THE telephone in the booth downstairs was the depository of many nickels half an hour later. Danny Shane tried to locate Howell and Flood at every conceivable resort in town, but without success. No one had seen them in some time, and no one knew their plans. Danny reported his failure with chagrin. Deker, assuming full charge of operations, thought this unexpected contingency over for a moment.

"I think I know where they are," he announced suddenly. "They're hardly in town or some one would have word of them. Let's take a ride in the country and see if we can run across them."

Tim Masterson opened his mouth to object to so random a proceeding, then closed it again. He was far from persuaded by Deker's argument, but Tim had many times operated on the principle that given enough rope a killer will surely hang himself. He kept silent and allowed Deker his way.

The five of them climbed into the Cadillac sedan. Shane took the wheel. Deker directed him to drive to River Street and thence over the Main Street bridge to Bear Creek Road.

"Stop on the way after crossing the bridge and we'll ask every cop we see if Howell's big Rolls phaeton passed by this evening. Tim, you do the asking."

Danny followed instructions, and in the first five miles out they were twice encouraged. Two policemen had not observed the phaeton, but one hazarded a guess that it had gone by and a State highway patrolman on a motorcycle finally told them definitely that he had seen it.

"All right, Danny," Deker said after this. "That settles it. Head straight for the Castles. They'll be there."

"What makes you so sure of all this?" Masterson demanded.

"Simple logic, Tim. They have their

reasons for leaving town tonight and letting the pot boil of its own free will. They started things and it's their cue to keep far away and play the innocents from here out. The Castles is Flood's playground. And if they actually are celebrating, it's the most expensive and exclusive joint within a hundred miles. They're big shots now, Tim, don't forget that."

Masterson grunted. He was not forgetting anything, least of all the incontrovertible fact that Howell and Flood were big shots, and that he was about to sit in with them in a very dangerous game.

The Castles roadhouse was situated on a mountainside. It was the favorite resort of those who cared not about cover charges, liked good wine and appreciated discreet seclusion. It boasted a broad terrace with a dance floor, from which could be had the most stunning view in that part of the State. It boasted also, but in a whisper, of the elegantly furnished private dining rooms on the second floor. The Castles was reached from the main highway by a narrow macadam road.

Danny stopped the car at the end of a row of parked automobiles behind the resort. They all emerged and walked around to the front entrance together. Deker led the way.

The head waiter hastened into the foyer to greet this distinguished party, and he gave them effusive welcome. Deker ignored the man and walked to the doors leading to the main dining room and terrace. He surveyed the scattered gathering of early visitors briefly, and returned.

"Jake Howell upstairs?" he demanded of the head waiter.

Discretion was part of that functionary's stock in trade, and he hesitated. Deker's formidable gaze and the presence of the chief of police of Hagarton helped to make up his mind, however. There can be more than one kind of discretion.

"Yes, Mr. Deker," he answered. "It is a private party. He is with Mr. Flood and two lady guests for dinner upstairs." He waited, watching the effect of this news on Deker.

"We'll go on up," Deker said shortly. "Which room?"

"Oh, but, Mr. Deker—"

"Which room?" snapped Deker. "You keep out of this or you'll regret it."

The head waiter swallowed hard. He looked at Deker for a second and then bowed with resigned composure.

"The east room, sir. To the right on the stairs. At the end of the hall."

Deker looked about the foyer. To one side was a cloak room, with a girl leaning idly on the counter watching them. Deker walked over to her.

"Let me have Jake Howell's cane," he requested.

The girl cast a worried glance at the head waiter, but he offered no help. She had witnessed his surrender, and did not resist. She lifted Howell's stout malacca stick from a hook beneath a shelf and gave it to Deker.

For an instant Deker paused, absorbed in a minute examination of the cane. He gripped it with both hands and turned it this way and that. Abruptly he left off and turned to the others.

"Ready, gentlemen?" he inquired.

They proceeded across the foyer and up the stairs, leaving a very apprehensive head waiter in the center of the floor.

The door of the east room was locked, but it was opened in response to Deker's knock. Billy Flood's long face appeared, and instantly registered astonishment and resentment.

"What do you want, Deker?" he demanded.

"Invite me in and find out," said Deker. "Invite the rest of my party, too. We've all come a long way just to have a talk with you."

Flood's impulse was to slam the door in Deker's face, but a glance at Masterson's grim countenance enabled him to suppress it. With a semblance of stiff

courtesy he drew open the door and held it for them to enter.

The east room looked out above the veranda on the great valley below. It was handsomely furnished with comfortable chairs, a couch covered with rich velvet, and a table in the center gleaming with linen and silver. At the table sat Jake Howell, wearing a look of surprised affability, and two handsome women with challenging eyes. Howell rose to greet his unexpected visitors.

"Well, gentlemen, you take me somewhat unawares," he said, smiling. "Nevertheless I'm glad to see you."

"The pleasure is mutual," Deker answered. He glanced at the two silent and slightly self-conscious women. "We have interrupted the dinner because of pressing reasons of business. Perhaps the ladies would not mind if we excused them for a few minutes while the business is disposed of?"

The women turned their eyes on Howell to discover his wishes. One laughed in soft, throaty fashion.

"Do we mind, Jake?" she asked.

A flash of anger passed over Howell's eyes, but it disappeared. He bowed to them and apologized.

"I'm sorry, my dears, but I hope you won't mind. I'll have the waiter show you to another room for the moment." He walked to the wall and pressed a button.

When they were alone Billy Flood assumed charge. He strode across the room to the gathering about the table.

"What the hell's the idea? Masterson, why do you bring an arrested murderer to this place at such a time? I demand an explanation!"

"Ho!" exclaimed Deker. "You're riding high and mighty now, Billy Flood, aren't you? Well, this unconvicted murderer is slightly more than anxious to offer an explanation."

"I asked none from you, Deker."

"No, but it's from me you're going to get them. Sit down in your chair."

"Masterson—" began Flood.

"Sit down," snapped the chief of police. "All of you sit down. We'll thresh this thing out right here and now. There's nobody wants explanations more than I do, and I'm going to have them. You first, Deker."

He kicked forward a chair and sat on it deliberately, one hand drumming on the table edge. The others did likewise with the exception of Detective Chonsky. Chonsky sauntered to a chair standing against the side wall. He occupied it quietly and began studying the profiles of Howell and Flood.

DEKER looked from one to another of the two disgruntled but wary men across the table. He leaned forward and talked directly to them.

"You're a slippery and clever pair, you two," he said. "You almost put it over. You got Matt, you got Frankie, and you came close to getting me. If you had succeeded, you'd be running Hagarton now. You'd be hard at work consolidating your hold on the town and cutting in on the beer and alky money and looking forward to the biggest clean-up ever made in Hagarton. It was a swell dream while it lasted. But it's over now!"

"Really?" Jake Howell said pleasantly. "May I ask just what it is you're talking about?"

"You bet you may ask!" Deker paused, grinning with bared teeth. "Jake Howell, you're going to take the rap for killing Frankie Russell. Billy Flood, you'll take it as an accomplice. I've got you nailed and I'm going to drive home the spikes with pleasure. That's what I'm talking about. How do you like it?"

Howell and Flood exchanged glances. Flood smiled softly and returned his gaze to Deker.

"Jake," said Deker, "you were a pretty good guy till you got the Napoleon complex. You were always a good crook, but you played square with the big shots because that seemed best.

Then you got to looking about at other cities and taking notice of what a smart guy with lots of nerve could put over. Hagarton was wide open—except for Matt Regan. Wide open—an ambitious racketeer needn't even buck a flock of guns because Matt had kept them out. All he needed to do was get rid of Regan, and then with a small mob back of him just help himself to the town. He could play off Slovak against Marsilio and both of them against Tim Masterson, and swallow the lot of them whole. It was really a swell dream."

Howell listened quietly, his face now expressing nothing. Flood played with a match disdainfully. Slovak leaned back in his chair across the table and watched the two with brooding, ironic eyes. Chonsky also looked at them, stolid and impassive in his chair against the wall.

"You brought in a pair of big city gunmen," Deker continued, his voice quiet and cold, "and you had Matt Regan bumped off. Nobody knew, but some suspected, just how that happened. Whitey is one. He didn't know enough to make it safe to talk, but he knew enough to realize what was going to happen to him when you were bossing things.

"Your two gunmen were paid in part before their job was done. They took it on the lam for Havana where they were to be paid the rest. It wasn't safe to use the mails or cables, so you sent Russell down with the pay-off. Frankie lost his head and plunged at the races, losing everything. He came home broke without settling with your gunmen.

"I suppose you might have overlooked that once, but Frankie got in a jam here in town too. The breaks were against him. He was close to double-crossing you to save himself. You were afraid of that. And then you saw him and me talking last night and you heard me lay down the law. That looked like the end. Frankie had to go. And I had to go with him because you knew that I'd spent three months doing nothing but waiting, watching, listening for the first crack that would give away the game. I didn't know whose game but I knew I'd find out eventually. You killed Frankie because he was weak and knew too much—you didn't dare try bumping me but you framed me to take a rap for murder. I had you scared, and you couldn't move with me alive!"

"Huh!" Flood uttered. "Who are you turning out to be?"

"Just John Deker, Billy. A gambler and a politician and the biggest monkey wrench that ever got into your machinery. I'm no dick, but I was Matt Regan's pal—and that says plenty. I'm going to stick around till they drape a rope collar around your neck. I'm leaving the details of when and where and exactly how it all happened to Tim Masterson, and Tim is the boy can get them out of you. He can find out what you told Frankie to induce him to call me and arrange a meeting at that deserted corner. He can find out how you put the screws on that restaurant owner so that he up and alibied Danny Shane when the frameup went haywire on you for awhile. He can find out a lot."

Jake Howell now sat like a man of stone, his skin gray, his eyes fish-like and deadly. Billy Flood's eyes were immobile on Deker. Billy spoke raspingly.

"This is all very well, Deker, but it hangs together like a pile of jackstraws. We visited the joints last night after leaving you, and played poker at the Club till the news of the killing came in. We never saw Russell alive after leaving him with you. Try and break that!"

"I'll break it," Whitey drawled in a voice of quiet viciousness. "You were at my joint with Frankie Russell."

"I can break it too," said Deker. "I can prove that you arrived at the Club at two or three minutes of two. Your alibi doesn't cover the time of Russell's death."

Flood turned and looked at Whitey

Slovak with the eyes of a basilisk. Then his gaze returned to Deker.

"Well," he said, "you've worked hard on this, haven't you? You two think you can frame us on that." He laughed. It was a metallic, humorless laugh. "I can work up a better case against either of you myself. Your evidence is hearsay and conjecture and entirely circumstantial. You'll have to prove how I, or Jake, managed to kill Russell, for one thing. He wasn't just scared to death, if I have the facts."

Deker stood up at the table. Jake Howell for the first time recognized the malacca cane in Deker's hand. Something inside him seemed to wilt.

"We all drove out here," said Deker, "in a Cadillac sedan that belongs to Buck Newell. You know the car, Flood. You hired it last night. I hired it today. I went all over it and this is what I found hidden in the lining where a couple of upholstery tacks had been loosened."

Deker drew from his pocket a crumpled handkerchief and tossed it on the table. It unfolded, and revealed a long, irregular stain of the dull red hue of blood. On one corner of the handkerchief there was an embroidered initial H.

"That's yours, Jake Howell!" Deker rasped. "I took another like it from your house tonight." He threw beside the stained handkerchief another fresh from Howell's dresser. "It was used to clean the blade that killed Frankie Russell. And here's the blade you've carried around Hagarton for months and finally used on Frankie at the corner of Maple and Bolton at a quarter of two last night."

Deker raised the malacca stick and gave a twist and a pull to the handle. It came away from the stick proper and drew from the hollow interior a bright, three sided miniature rapier as delicate and fine as a long blade of grass. It measured fully fourteen inches to the tip, and the tip had the point of a needle.

Jake Howell uttered an oath. His was the voice of a man betrayed. He turned on Billy Flood and was beside himself with trembling fury. The veins stood out on his forehead, and his clenched hands trembled.

"You put that there, you double-crossing rat!" he shouted. "You were going to burn it, to get rid of it. And damn your treacherous soul, you were framing me—" He choked in his rage, impotent with hatred.

"So," said Deker, "the dirt is coming out! Evidence planted to balance against Jake before a jury and provide an out for Billy in case of trouble. Not likely to be found unless somebody broke the whole case all at once. Evidence to turn a jury against Jake while Billy played the unwilling accomplice. Clever—too damn clever. Where did you call from when you threatened me with going on the spot this morning, Flood?"

Billy Flood had been paying no attention to Howell's denunciation. His frozen eyed gaze was fixed on Deker. Then suddenly a chair crashed to the floor. Flood was on his feet, taking cover behind a table, drawing a long barreled revolver from his belt. It flashed through the air and spat thunderous flame across the table at Deker. Deker spun on his feet, turning sidewise, his hand going for his gun. His face lividly reflected the intense emotions that smoldered beneath his mask of self-possession.

But that shot was echoed instantly by the sharp crack of a .38 Service pistol across the room. Over against the wall Detective Chonsky, a wisp of smoke curling from the gun in his hand, sat still in his chair and watched with impassive eyes as Billy Flood shivered and failed to complete that swooping dive.

Every one watched, frozen. Whitey Slovak, his gun poised but unfired, watched with opaque gaze. Deker left his gun in the rear pocket where his hand gripped it, finger already about the

trigger. Flood choked, tried several times to speak, and suddenly toppled over below the table edge. There, sprawled on the floor, he gave one convulsive heave and went limp. His shirt about the collar instantly began to turn bright red in color.

"Oh, Lord!" Howell said hoarsely. He went to pieces in the chair.

Tim Masterson sprang upon him and jerked him to his feet like a sack of oats. Masterson pulled a revolver from Jake's pocket and flung it across the room. He looked at Howell and a snarl distorted his features and bared his teeth.

Then he struck the big man a crashing blow on the jaw. Howell was flung backward against his chair, overturning it and piling in a limp heap on the floor. He moaned once and covered his face with his hands.

Masterson turned to the others.

"Deker, you're all right. Slovak, put that gun away. Chonsky, go find a telephone. Get headquarters on the wire. Notify the State police barracks too. This is their jurisdiction. We'll have to deal with them first, but this is one pinch that's coming back to town with me tonight!"

Downstairs, muted and distant, the orchestra played on. The number was "Bye, Bye, Blues".

Later, when the room was thronged with police and officials and the preliminary investigation was under way, Whitey Slovak sauntered up to John Deker. He looked at him for a moment. Deker returned the look, smiling faintly. He had escaped that murderous bullet and was unscathed.

"Who did you say," asked Whitey, "the next boss of Hagarton would be, John?"

"I didn't say," Deker corrected him. "I'm not going to say."

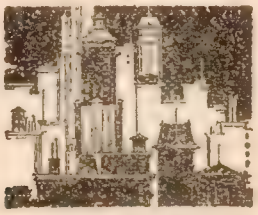
"Well, who do you think?"

Deker shook his head slowly before he spoke.

"Not I, Whitey. Nor you, either. Nor Tony Marsilio. There'll be a tussle for it, but it'll be in the open. We'll all sit on the sidelines and watch. And maybe, if we watch carefully enough, we can lend our influence to make certain that the winner is a guy that's at least half the man old Matt Regan was in his day in Hagarton."

"O. K. with me," said Whitey.

They smiled easily, for they understood each other.



RIDERS

By R. E. ALEXANDER

Uncle Sam Majors eats tobacco from a plug;
Big Ben Waddell drinks red licker from a jug—
"Step along, Surefoot, you're th' Pony Express!"

In an April noontide, two riders wait—
One in old St. Jo', one by Golden Gate;
Wait that pistol flash that's the word to go:
"They're off!" As arrow flies from the bow,
So the Pony Express will giddup 'n' go!

Old Ben Holladay was rubber, iron and grit.
If there's mail in Tophet, surely Ben delivers it.
"Git goin', Gumption, you're th' Pony Express!"

(Oh, every Sunday morning, when I am by your side,
We'll step into the wagon and we'll all take a ride!)

The Pintes called Charlie Cliff, "Pale-Face-Can't-Be-Killed!"
They put nine bullets in him—and he wasn't half filled!
"Jump, Jack Rabbit, you're th' Pony Express!"

The Father of Waters must be fast tied
To far Pacific, so slim youths ride
Two thousand miles through a wild, free West . . .
When crows were in feather and off the nest,
If you were a rider, you rode your best.

Young Ed' Sowerby could hit a horse-fly
On the wing, at twenty yards, and not half try!
"Loosen up, Lizard, you're th' Pony Express!"

(Oh, the other side of Mississippi—it was there, you know,
My pappy and my mammy called me Jim-Along-Joe!)

Young Bill Cody sure was hell-on-wheels;
All the time stepping on some buffalo's heels!
"Lope along, Lightnin', you're th' Pony Express!"

Ponies ran twenty-five miles—and quit.
Riders went seventy-five—and lit
Limber-jointed and second to none . . .
Arrow and bullet, storm and sun
Beat upon them; but stayed not one.

Slim Jim Johnson ran a coyote down,
Chased a rattler through Prairie-Dog-Town!
"Hop to it, Handsome, you're th' Pony Express!"

(My own true love is sleeping tonight, in the churchyard under the hill;
She will not be alone in her grave tonight—my heart is with her still.)

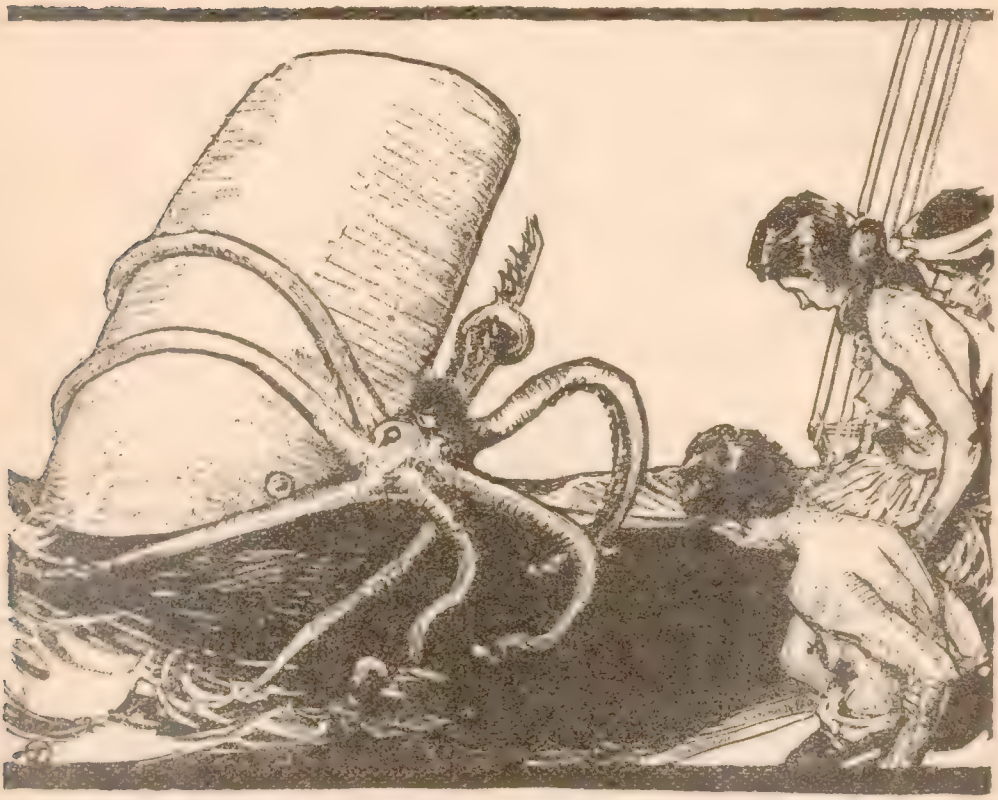
Hank Wells would spit, and say: "It's got to be done."
Bill Fargo, he would do it—the young son-of-a-gun!
"Hustle, Horace Greeley, you're th' Pony Express!"

They brought in their twenty pounds of mail,
Though Old Ned himself disputed the trail.
Many a letter went on, dyed red,
While a pony and rider rested dead.
Steel followed where man and pony led.

Hell-bent for Sacramento; see the riders go—
Now they're skyshooting back to old St. Jo'—
"Push along, pony, you're th' Mail 'n' Express!"

The KAHUNA

By FREDERICK HOPKINS



WE ROWED ashore to Lahaina early in the morning, soon as we'd reached the island of Maui and found anchorage for the old *Corinthian.* Anchor was dropped in the harbor, I say, and we rowed ashore, me and the mate and the cooper and the ship's carpenter—all of us quiet elderly men, excepting the mate. And we made for the landing beach, expecting to find the usual crowd of Kanakas and brown girls and deserters and beachcombers and missionaries all a-waitin' for us there.

But no such luck! The beach was empty. This time we were fooled. There was the coral beach, dazzling white under the risen sun, its shadows of purple and orange not yet dispersed. There was the hot little town built along one side of its only street. There was the big banyan tree pushing up its snaky, weatherbeaten roots like traps to catch the traveler's foot. There was the old Pioneer Hotel, bombastically built, "all outside rooms with private veranda to each room", waiting for a good stiff gale to blow it down.

And farther away, thick clumps of trees, stretches of bleak meadow whereon rose native grass houses set on

posts, like haystacks. Then the ruined stone temple of heathen times, the cultivated fields of *taro,* the wooded mountainside, the little buildings of the Normal School peeping out midway, and at the summit the enormous volcanic dome of Maui looming above the clouds.

But where were the folks? Nobody was in sight on the beach. The only people I could see were a few old men and old women, their clothes tucked up good and high, playing hop-scotch in the middle of the road alongside the missionary's house.

We jumped out on the beach and hauled the boat up a little way.

"You stay here, all of ye," I says to the mate. "I'm goin' to find the missionary. 'Tain't likely I'll be gone long. Soon as he says the word I'll give shore leave—not before."

For I had a kind of an understanding with the missionary—very fine man he was, the Reverend Cameron—I had an understanding with him that I'd always see him before giving my foremast hands shore leave.

Not that my men were any worse than the general run of foremast hands. Fact was, they averaged better. But the Reverend Cameron preferred to send the young women of his Sunday School up into the mountains while the whaleships were lying in the harbor with their crews ashore. The men didn't like it, and probably all the girls didn't. But after all, the Reverend Cameron's Sunday School didn't include all the girls in Lahaina. Anyway, that is what we done, and it worked out pretty fair.

"Keep within sight of the boat," I says to the mate, "and don't you go wandering round." Not that I was afraid of what the cooper and the ship's carpenter might do.

The missionary's house wasn't far away—a white house built of wood, with a veranda, and trees round it. As I neared it the Reverend Cameron come out on the veranda and waved his hand to me.

Everybody knew the reverend—short and rather stout, with a pleasant face, his upper lip shaved and a little gray beard underneath his chin.

We shook hands and passed the time of day. I'd seen him six months previous.

"I'm just sending my Sunday School up the mountain," he says, after we'd had some little talk. "They'll all be gone by night."

"Ain't they gone already?" I says. "Where are they all? The only ones I see are the old folks playing hop-scotch."

The reverend give a cough.

"You are right, Cap'n Buckminster. It seems a reproach to my ministry, but there are times when these people get beyond my control. Just now there's an outbreak of superstition among them. They are dancing the hula."

"Sho!" I says. "Then p'raps that explains the drums I hear. I thought I heard the calabash drums not so far away."

"You did," says the reverend. "For the last fortnight the drums have been sounding continuously."

"What's it all about?" I says. "The big drums aren't beaten unless there's trouble of some kind. There must be a reason for it."

"The reason—" the reverend went on to explain—"the reason lies in a young fisherman named Keawe."

"Keawe?" I says, "I had a young feller by that name sailed with me on one of my voyages."

"Very likely the same man," says the reverend. "In general he's a good enough chap. The trouble started when two hula girls fell in love with him."

"Both jealous, I s'pose."

"Exactly."

"Which girl does he favor?"

"Well—" the Reverend Cameron stroked his shaven chin. "One of these girls has been going with Keawe for some years. Nice girl, too. I'd expect 'em to be married most any time. But here comes along another—a yellow girl who makes her living dancing along the

waterfront in Honolulu. I don't know anything definite against her, but you can judge what she's apt to be. Keawe is taken with her. In fact, it's a case of off with the old love."

"Can't you talk him back?" I says. "The Kanakas are easy to persuade. I bet I could do it."

"No doubt you could, if anybody," the reverend agrees. "Except for one thing. The native girl thinks herself bewitched. She is convinced that this halfbreed girl has procured magic, has bewitched her and has sent a devil to eat her up. Her friends are dancing the hula to drive away the magic. That's the sum and substance of it."

"Those halfbreed yellow people are queer folks," I says. "Some of 'em have the reputation of being able to throw a spell. There may be some truth in it. Where are these girls?"

"Probably at the hula—or at least one of them. Most of the neighborhood is there, in fact." He took down his hat from the nail in the wall. "Would you be interested to walk around in that direction? They're dancing in one of the native houses. Any one is free to look on. I'd rather like to show you the sort of thing I have to contend with in my missionary work."

WE WALKED along, talking as we walked.

"There is the house," says the reverend. "The grass house open in front and with all the people squatting on the ground. The dancers are friends of the native girl. Popular sympathy here doesn't favor the halfbreed."

"Where is the yellow gal?" I says. "I'd like to look her over."

"I don't know. I've never seen her. I doubt if she comes to Lahaina."

"So Keawe follows her to Honolulu, does he?"

"Apparently. He's a sailor as well as a fisherman, you know."

We reached the house, where five girls were hard at work dancing the hula, while two men sat on the ground beating the drums. The girl Kalama was sitting on the grass with many others. We sat down beside her. A pretty girl, with flowers in her hair and a *lei* round her neck. But scared stiff! So scared she could hardly speak.

"Kalama," I says to her, "don't you remember me?" I'd seen the girl before.

"Yes, Cap'n Buckminster, I remember you." She spoke very faint.

"Well, now, what's all this I'm hearin' about you? What's the trouble?"

"Much trouble," she says. "I am bewitched! Bewitched, and Keawe has deserted me."

"Sho!" says I. "Deserted ye, has he? I ain't so sure about that. I wouldn't take it that way if I was you. How'd it happen? Tell me the story. Maybe we can fix it." So little by little, what with her telling and the reverend helping out, I got the story.

It seems that two or three weeks previous to this the young Kanaka, Keawe, had set out one morning in one of their outrigger canoes, taking with him this girl Kalama and a Kanaka fisherman—I forget what he was called—for a day's fishing, as he'd been in the habit of doing off and on.

Well, they done their fishing, and along past noon they'd worked out to the northeast'ard a number of miles from East Maui. And there on one of the coral reefs—there's a plenty of coral reefs grown up under water on the lava slopes—there on a little coral reef they seen some wreckage. At least, they took it to be wreckage—a small deckhouse, a to'gallant focsle as they made it out to be, along with timbers and some miscellaneous wreckage. It all lay there on the sand of the reef, rising and falling with each sea that flowed over.

There was nothing to show what ship the wreckage come from—no name or anything—and it all lay easy on the reef. However, if a good hard blow should come I guess 'twas all ready to wash away. So the Kanakas thought; and they paddled up close, as nigh as

they dared venture to the patch of sand that the slow Pacific swell rode over in a wreath of foam.

The deckhouse floated and thumped as the seas lifted it. The door had washed away and the companionway stood open, but the inside of it was dark.

However, there in the wash beside the deckhouse was something bulky floating—a trunk they took it to be, or a bale of goods. They paddled up to it.

The second Kanaka—he was sitting in the bow of the canoe—laid down his paddle, took his long fish spear in his hand, stood up and give a poke to this bundle floating awash, wanting to see what it might be.

With that the thing moved and begun to come to life. And opening out like a big umbrella, it showed a great rounded head, smooth and brown, crowned by a mess of writhing tentacles, and with two immense green eyes more 'n a foot long—monstrous, shiny, dark green eyes. With its eyes fixed on the canoe, it begun to edge up closer.

The Reverend Cameron was telling it. He looked over at me.

"Of course you recognize the animal?"

"Sure," I says. "Nothing but a squid. I s'pose they like to make it out a big one."

"It was a great devil-squid," says the girl. "As big as this house."

"Hey, wait!" I says. "Don't go so fast! Big as a house? What does the boy say? Where is that Keawe?"

The minister got up on his feet.

"Keawe must be round here somewhere. Sit still. I'll find him." And he walked away.

"Young woman," I says to the girl, "what is your regular occupation, if I may ask?"

She was losing some of her scare.

"I am a hula dancer, from Hanalei."

"I s'pose you're pretty good at it."

"The *olapa*, the *ho'o-paa*—I dance them all."

"I don't know what those dances may be," I says, "and I have no wish to know. Are you a fisherman too?"

"Keawe and I have fished and ridden the surf together for many years."

"Then what was there special about this squid?"

"If you only could have seen it, Cap'n Buckminster," she says. "It swam toward us, wriggling its long arms, chewing and biting the air with its horny parrot-beak big as your two fists. And suddenly it shot out one of its long feelers, wrapped it round the canoe, fastened its suckers on us and sought to draw us under the water. You would have said it was a devil!"

"But ain't that what any squid would do—any squid that was big enough? How about that, Keawe?" For the Reverend Cameron had just come back, bringing the young Kanaka with him.

"Yes, if it was big enough."

"This one was as big as a house, wasn't it, Keawe?" the girl says. "It was a devil-squid."

"The squid was as big as a house, yes," says the young Kanaka. "It may have been a devil."

"Even so," I says, kind of cautious, "even so, I ain't heard anything to show where the magic comes from. If it was me, I should find that out, and I should go there and I should bust things up. I ain't got any time to waste."

"There is a woman who lives in Nihau," says Kalama. "An old woman. She gets her magic from the lava caves. She finds many old idols there. I'd be afraid to go to her."

"All squids are devilish," I says. "The only difference is the size."

"The devil-squid wrapped one of its long arms around me," says the girl. "It set its suckers against me. I screeched loud until Keawe took the fish spear and cut off the arm that held me. He has it yet."

"No harm was done," says Keawe.

Kalama shook her head.

"Don't try to defend that girl! You saw the devil-squid shoot a long arm around the fisherman who struck at it. You saw it drag him overboard, strik-

ing the gunwale of the canoe again and again with its horny beak, in anger. You know how we all pried at the suckers, how the drowning fisherman struggled and choked as the devil discharged its ink."

Keawe found nothing to say.

"You remember," went on the girl, "how it backed off into the water, dragging the fisherman with it, and disappeared under the surface of the swell. How now and again a slimy arm would raise itself into our sight, then drop back, and the long swell would flow smoothly over the reef again."

THE calabash drums were thumping louder. The five hula girls were working to a climax.

"They are describing it," explained the Reverend Cameron. "They are telling how the squid swam away with the body of the fisherman in its arms."

"And now," I says, "I s'pose they'll sing about how they caught the squid and put an end to his mischief."

"Not at all," answers the reverend. "They haven't caught the squid."

"What?" says I. "Is that squid still swimming round, attacking fishermen and eating of 'em up? That's not right. Why don't somebody do something?"

Keawe shook his head.

"The squid has not harmed Kalama."

"But it tried to," says the girl. "The magic is very powerful. It will get me in the end, unless we use superior magic. We really should go to the witch doctor."

"Well," I says, "why not?"

"I know a *kahuna,*" says Keawe. "He lives not far away—an old, old man. His hut lies up on the slope of the mountain, though he may be bird catching just now."

"Get him," I says. "What's to prevent?"

"Nothing," says Keawe, "except that we must pay him. He won't do anything without pay."

"How much?"

"I don't know. Perhaps twenty-five dollars."

"That's consid'able money," I says. "But never mind. I'll stand for it. Here's my offer. Get your *kahuna.* I'll loan ye the money. You can pay me back next time you ship with me for a voyage. I'll trust ye till then. So bring along your *kahuna.*"

"We must find him first," says Keawe. "He is usually somewhere in the forest near the top of the mountain. We'll be apt to find him there."

"If that means climbing the mountain," I says, "count me out. I certainly can't climb the lava blocks with my shoes on, and no civilized man can climb 'em barefoot."

The Reverend Cameron laughed.

"Don't let that worry you. Come along with the Sunday School when we go up the mountain. We are almost ready to start along. We'll sling a chair for you. The bearers will enjoy doing it."

"All right," I says. "But don't let me overstay. I've got a boat's crew waiting down on the beach, and I ain't none too sure what that mate of mine might do."

"We won't lose any time," says the reverend. "The hula dancing will probably continue indefinitely. The Sunday School pupils are waiting in the chapel."

"I'm with you!" I says, as I followed along with 'em. "As to disposing of the squid, I'm willing to advance the money. 'Twould be liable to grab a whaleboat in mid ocean. I certainly don't want to be the next victim. I'll say that squid's days are numbered."

"Will the *kahuna* kill it?" asks the girl.

"He will pray it to death," says Keawe. "The whale will eat it and the shark will consume the fragments."

"Cheer up, young woman," I says. "The squid is as good as dead already."

The drums were still going when we reached the little chapel. There we found the Sunday School—the female part of it—ready and waiting. They all of 'em had on their Mother Hubbards,

tucked up high so 's not to bother 'em, and there they waited, all fixed for the climb. Most of the young men of the school were with 'em, carrying the luggage hung on poles. Quite a little company!

So I jumped into a chair and four husky Kanakas shouldered the poles and set off lively, proud of their job.

"Hey!" I says. "Remember I can't stay ashore overnight. How you going to get me back to the ship?"

"Don't you worry 'bout that," says the reverend. And without more words we set off.

We followed a little stream that come trickling down among the lava blocks. In places there was a grassy bank where we could make good time, so that within a couple of hours we'd reached what we'd been aiming for—a wide breadth of lava soil, grassed in spots and planted in something or other. At the edge of the lava breadth stood the two *wahine* houses where the women folks were to stay.

The bearers set down the chair and I stepped out. Below us lay the village of Lahaina, all vine covered and grass thatched. Beyond the village, with its shining beach of white coral, stretched the bay and anchorage. On the left rose the heights of Lanai and Molokai; at the right tossed the dark waters of Maalea, and farther still lay the ocean.

"This is a kind of a pretty place," I says to the Reverend Cameron. "Planted in *taro,* ain't it? This terrace looks to be the best piece of farm work I've seen in all the islands."

So it seemed. 'Twas some distance above the sea, a squarish piece of ground, leveled, cultivated and planted. All round it stood tall lava blocks, like a heavy wall, but now mostly in ruins.

" 'Twan't meant for farm work," says the reverend. "This was one of their old heathen temples. Here stood some of their gods, five wooden idols with shark mouths, tall and ugly, looking out to sea. That stone you're a-settin' on—"

To be sure, I'd just set down on a block of stone.

"That stone with the groove cut across it was the stone of sacrifice, so they say. The victims were strangled on it and the blood ran down through the groove."

"Sho!" I says. "Ain't all those things past and gone?"

"You'd be surprised," says the reverend, "how superstition sticks in the native mind. A *kahuna* still has power to pray a man to death."

"Can a *kahuna* pray a squid to death?"

Keawe spoke up.

"A *kahuna* can pray anything to death. A squid may be difficult—yes. But a *kahuna* should be able to do it. I mentioned one, an old, old man. He lives here, not far away, on the slope of this mountain."

"I didn't s'pose there was any left," I says. "Likely this is the only one."

"Perhaps," agreed Keawe. "He is very old. He and his fathers were the king's birdcatchers for many generations. That was long ago, and perhaps there are no others left, but he is still a *kahuna.*"

"Then let's go after him," I says. "There ain't so much time."

I hadn't scarcely said it when Keawe give a whistle—a soft whistle, but very clear, like a bird. And an old man stepped out from behind one of the lava blocks and come walking quietly to us.

HE WAS a thin but wiry old man with wrinkled legs and a mask of a face. His eyes were dark, sunken and piercing. A thick mop of curling white hair clustered round a shiny bald spot above his forehead. For his only clothing he wore a red cotton *malo* and a civilized shirt that had once been white.

What I noticed most was the nails of his hands and feet—long as if they'd never been cut, and thickened at the base like the claws of birds. So he came

walking toward us, stooping, bowlegged, swinging his arms, walking like an ape.

"Hello," I says. "What kind of a man are you?"

"I am the birdcatcher," answers the old man.

"The birdcatcher?"

Keawe began to explain.

"For many years his fathers were birdcatchers of the king. They climbed through the forest, catching the *o-o*, the little black bird which bears under each wing a single feather of royal yellow. That feather he took and loosed the bird again, and the yellow feather was woven into the royal capes. It was an honorable calling."

"But there ain't any more capes made now," I says.

"That is true," the old man agreed. "There is no one left to wear the capes now that the kings are gone. I sell the feathers. I also am a canoe digger, and I hunt wild cattle for the market. In such ways I make my living."

"Well, now," I says, "we're bringing you another little job which will pay you well—that is, providing you'll pray a squid to death for us."

"A squid? Where are your fish nets?"

"It is too big for nets," says Keawe. "This is a monstrous squid."

"It is a devil!" the girl says. "It tried to sink our canoe and it killed a fisherman in the boat with us. It is a devil and it can only be killed with magic!"

"Sixty foot across," I says. "More 'n that, if you'll believe their yarns."

The old man scratched his bald spot.

"I never heard of a squid so big. As big as that, it will cost considerable."

"I'll pay it," I says. "The money is waiting. Twenty-five dollars ought to be enough for praying a squid to death. Or kill it some other way—I don't care."

"Have you a *mauna* to pray on?"

"We have a fine *mauna*," answers Keawe. "The end of the squid's long feeler. I cut it off with the fish spear."

"And the sacrifice?"

"Oh, has there got to be a sacrifice?" I says. "This is all new to me. I'm a greenhorn when it comes to praying a squid to death. What kind of a sacrifice would you recommend?"

"They generally offer up a black pig," says Keawe. "Those that can afford it."

"Pigs are fairly cheap," I says. "I guess we can afford a black one, providing that's the best."

"It's not strictly the best," mumbled the old man, looking from me to Keawe and from Keawe to me. "There is a better, if you desire it."

"Then let's have it."

Keawe shook his head.

"It can't be! He means the old way."

"Oho!" says I. "Human sacrifice!"

"Even Keawe," mumbles the old man. "Keawe belongs to me. Even Keawe!"

"He is talking of far off times," explained Keawe. "The ancient order and the old law. He forgets how long ago that was. Under the old law I should belong to him, that is true.

"You see," Keawe goes on, "it was like this. My mother lived on the mountain. When I was a baby, soon after I was born, she was going to bury me alive, as she had buried my seven brothers and sisters. The hole was all dug. Just then the birdcatcher passed by, saw what my mother was about to do and he asked to have me. My mother accordingly gave me to him. He cared for me, brought me up and taught me to snare the *o-o* bird. Under the old law, therefore, I belonged to him and he would have the right to offer me up as a sacrifice."

"I guess that law is abrogated," I says, "fur 's you're concerned. I wouldn't worry about being offered up if I were you."

"I won't! The life of a squid is not worth the life of a man. To be sure, it got a fisherman, but that was not my fault. A pig ought to be enough."

"Very good," I says. "Now how quick can we do it? I can't spare a great deal of time, for my ship's waiting. What with provisioning and outfitting and transshipping I've got all I can do. And by—the—way—I need a third mate."

Keawe squirmed around a bit and looked at me.

"For the rest of the voyage, Cap'n Buckminster?"

"No, Keawe. Just for a short season in the Arctic. Back here and discharge within six months. Good chance for some likely young feller that wants to get away for half a year and maybe make some money while he's gone."

Keawe was thinking hard.

"Could I have the berth, Cap'n Buckminster?"

I answered him deliberate.

"Why, yes, Keawe, the berth is yours if you apply for it. But time is short."

"I'm ready."

"Nuff said!" I put out my hand to him. "Come back with me. My boat's a-waiting at the beach."

SO 'TWAS agreed we should go back to the beach—the old man, Keawe and the girl—as soon as might be, I going first and the rest following. My chair-bearers took me down. Part of the way we coasted along the paved causeway on grass mats, and we went quick, I tell you. It didn't take long.

When we'd slid down most of the way, who should we meet but the mate, coming up on shank's mare.

"Hey!" I calls to him. "What you doing here? Turn round! You're going back on shipboard now. You can take your shore leave tomorrow."

In half an hour everybody was ready at the beach, the whaleboat was shoved off and we clomb in. The girl wore what she'd worn at the hula dancing—a skirt, with flowers in her hair and a *lei* around her neck. The men just wore their *malos,* though the *malo* of the old man was red. For this occasion he had discarded his once-white shirt, wearing in place of it a red handkerchief about his head.

In his arms the *kahuna* carried an idol carved out of wood, monstrous hideous and with a great shark mouth with real shark's teeth set into it. Keawe and the girl carried two calabash drums with sharkskin tops and two coconut shell rattles ornamented with feathers. With these things in their arms they climbed into the boat, where they found room for themselves in the bow.

The mate moved up to the thwart where the girl was standing, says something to her and took oar No. 1—to be sure, that was where he belonged.

"Here, you!" I says to the mate, "I'm goin' to leave you on shipboard. Take the starboard watch ashore and bring 'em all back by sundown."

"Don't you want I should go in this boat with you?" says the mate. "I might be of some help. I ain't partic'lar for shore leave today. I'm willing somebody else should take my place today."

"You'll take your shore leave when I give it to you," I says. "Next thing you'll be complaining you don't get none."

The mate didn't answer back, just looked over at the brown girl and put his oar in the rowlock.

I took the steering oar.

"Now first we'll get after that squid. And take it from me, his goose is cooked."

"We have sacrificed the black pig," says Keawe, "and the *kahuna* has brought the god."

The old man put down the idol on the little deck at the bow of the boat.

"This is Kuula, the fisherman's god. I am his priest. With his help I shall accomplish the destruction of the squid."

"Then if everything's correct," I says, "we'll go ahead. But first I'll put the mate and the cooper and the carpenter on shipboard."

The foremast jacks who rowed the boat had been setting quiet on the thwarts, very much interested, while the whaleboat bobbed on the water.

"Are you ready?" I sings out. "All aboard! Have you got your bearings, Keawe? Can you find the reef for us?"

Yes, Keawe had his bearings. He

could find the reef. And we shoved off and stepped the mast.

A whaleboat ain't the fastest thing afloat, but it's one of the surest, and for a couple of hours we sailed seaward from Hana as Keawe give us the course. By that time we were well out to sea and within sight of the reef where the squid picked off the fisherman.

We run in very close to the reef, so close we almost thumped on the sand with every surge. There hadn't been much change. The little deckhouse was still there just as Keawe had said, resting on the sandy bottom, but brought up by the coral floor and not going deep.

The ocean swell was smooth and powerful, deeper than it looked—probably four fathom difference in the rise and fall. The floor of the reef, of coral and white sand, was built up on deep points of lava coming sheer from the ocean bed—a crater rim tipped with branching coral.

The water was clear. We could see through it, could see the schools of little fishes, colored all sorts of changing shades, swimming fantastically through the coral network. We stopped rowing, laid on our oars and looked down, searching out the squid.

But no squid! We looked and we looked and he wasn't there. The old man lifted up the idol on the decked-over bow of the whaleboat and leaned it against the mast. There it stood, monstrous ugly, looking out over the ocean, while the *kahuna* gripped the calabash drums between his knees. Keawe took one rattle, the girl the other. Nobody said a word. We all looked down hard through the depths of the ocean. And while we looked, the *kahuna* began to strike his drums softly with the palm of his hand. At the same time he spoke at intervals in a low voice.

"He is insulting the squid," says Keawe. "He is calling the squid bad names. The squid will resent the terms in which he is addressed, and will appear to us." And Keawe gave a shake to his coconut shell rattle, the dried seeds inside it making a swish like waves on a sandy beach.

"He'll have to call him something worse," says the girl. "His words are not rough enough. I could do as well myself. That is a big squid and he needs harsh words." And she began to shake her rattle.

All of a sudden we all of us saw it together—the squid, coming up from deep water.

It moved deliberately, coming up head first, its writhing arms twisting to the surface of the water, waving over its head, its two long feelers searching out the hidden places and shadowy corridors where the seaweed washed. Up from the depths the squid rose, unhurried, following the irregular outline of the reef, its two green unwinking eyes, edged with white, bent hatefully upon us through the surging water.

With both hands the old man beat his drums, faster and faster, swaying to the rhythm, raising his voice, while Keawe and the girl shook their rattles, now here, now there, shuffling their feet in a kind of dance.

The squid reached the surface and lifted its head above it. Its eyes changed their color from green to black, looking at us very fierce, a boat's length away. We could see him perfectly plain. His body was a greenish white, spotted like a leopard's and with changing splashes of red and yellow. As he started to come nearer to us there shot out a horny beak from somewhere in the middle of him, and with it he threatened us and chewed the air.

From the lips of the *kahuna* there issued a torrent of abuse directed at the squid. Naturally, I couldn't understand, but I was sure the old man was using all the bad words in the ancient Hawaiian language—and I'm told there's a plenty!

All of a sudden Keawe dropped his rattle and laid his hand on the shoulder of the *kahuna*.

"Wait! Leave him to me!"

DRAWING his knife, Keawe dived overboard. We could see the brown soles of his feet as he kicked his way down. Arrived underneath the squid, he lunged venomously at it with his knife.

But quicker than the eye could follow, the squid sent out an arm and wrapped him round. Caught in the arm, Keawe cut it off. The creature shot out another arm—yet more arms—and caught Keawe in his embrace.

Speechless and scared, the girl watched until the squid was on the point of making his escape. Then at length she found her voice. And dropping her rattle, without a knife, without anything, she stepped on the gunwale of the whaleboat, raised her arms and, looking down one little instant, dived into the water where Keawe was still making a hopeless struggle.

"Keawe!" she shrieked.

As she reached the water the creature rose to meet her and caught her in its arms. And holding the Kanaka and the girl, with a flap like the folding of a big umbrella, it gave a great leap backward. Then another leap, and another, leap after leap, like a torpedo from a destroyer, seeking deep water, trying to get free of the shallows of the reef, while the waves were darkened by the creature's ink. Down they all went together, and before we could think of anything to do they were out of sight.

Had the old man stopped his drumming? No! He drummed faster and faster. Louder and louder he chanted his sing-song. His eyes were wild, he had forgotten us, peering after the escaping squid. He was in a frenzy, beside himself.

Now I'm an easy going man. 'Tain't often I lose my temper, and generally I'm quiet spoken. It takes a good deal to rile me up.

But here were two people run away with before my eyes—good brown people—to be drowned and et up! And by a squid! Now a squid ain't a regular animal; it's a nightmare. I confess I can hardly bear to think of it.

"Old man," I says, "if you know what's good for you, you'll call that squid back!"

He slapped his bare brown chest.

"I am the *kahuna!*"

"You a *kahuna,*" I says. "You apple bowed, square sterned brig, you're nothing but a derelict! By rights I ought to throw you overboard! It's a pity I can't do it!"

I'd got so far when something caught my eye. And I see that, though most generally I watch the ocean, here was a case where I'd failed to keep my weather eye open. A big black body was moving before us, a cloud in the ocean, as if a continent was rising, a long extinct volcano coming to activity again. A slippery black back was swinging along at the surface of the water.

And broadside of our boat, right on our beam, a big sperm whale rose up, head first, with a sound like escaping steam.

While we watched, two human heads popped up out of the water beside us. There they were, Keawe and the girl, blowing like porpoises, wiping the wet hair from off their blinking eyes. They'd been under water a good six minutes, and that's long enough to hold your breath. Puffing, they climbed into the boat.

Now that whale must have seen the squid, for on he swims, slow and high, his little black bull's eyes awash and keen to spy out whatever there might be. And old! So old that time meant nothing to him. More 'n a thousand years old he was if he was a day. Patches of gray spotted his oily, wrinkled skin. Barnacles covered his square, blunt head. In his narrow lower jaw, long and deadly as a monstrous rapier, weapon of many combats, the yellow teeth were worn down almost smooth.

An old bull whale he was, a lone bull whale, making a passage from one feeding ground to the next. Companions he had none; he had long outlived them all.

And after uncounted years he swam alone through the warm oceans, sufficient unto himself, contemptuous of what might happen.

AFRAID of us? Lord, no! Only curious. He had seen a plenty of whaleships and of the men who sail therein. Was there danger here? He looked across the water toward the old *Corinthian* lying in the distance and scanned her like a judge.

However, here was his breakfast; or was it his dinner? Anyway, here it was, a big squid. And the whale submerged a bit, enough to bring his little crafty eyes below the surface and keep the weather gage of the escaping squid.

The squid was scared. He had a right to be, for here was his deadliest enemy, the only creature in the wide ocean that he couldn't lick! The only one also that could lick the squid, that the suckers and the horny beak and the strangling arms of the squid were powerless against—the sperm whale, the whale with the teeth and the fighting jaw! Flustered and terrified by the presence of his mortal enemy, the squid forgets Keawe and the girl, turns about and with great leaps makes for the reef again, trying to hide among the coral, to blot himself against the convolutions of the reef.

The whale turned also. A cool and cunning fighter was the old whale, wary and full of tricks gathered in the oceans of the world and in every corner of the seven seas. A fighter of many battles! His towering and sinewy head was scored deep by the beaks of the giant squids that he had fought and conquered. His age? I guess he was the oldest whale that ever lived.

So while we looked the old whale up flukes and sounds in the deep water where the squid is trying to hide, blotted against the coral. He points his square nose down and he pushes against the squid, bumping him to make him loosen his grip on the coral branches.

The squid, in a panic, sends out his arms and feels all over the whale, trying to get a clutch. But the whale is smooth and greasy and the suckers don't take hold. This terrifies the squid. He thrusts out his horny beak and he bites against the whale's head as it keeps pushing against him. But the whale's head is all sinew, and when the squid bites him the whale don't even notice it. It's play for the whale and he enjoys it.

But after awhile he tires of it. So he stops pushing and lies still, drops his lower jaw and opens his mouth wide. Now the whale's mouth is white as marble inside, and there's a kind of a curious light about it that attracts the squid. Why it should attract him Lord only knows, but somehow it does, as you could plainly see.

Flashes of color pass over the squid—waves of red, orange, pale blue. He crawls closer and closer. Finally he can't seem to resist any longer, and into the wide open mouth of the whale he slides, taking up so much space that some of his arms hang over the edge. There he lays, hypnotized, like a drunken sailor in a barroom, marked for slaughter.

It can't last. When the old whale is good and ready he closes up his narrow lower jaw that has all the teeth in it. Whatever is hanging outside is bit off. A whale will never stop to pick up pieces of the squid, so they float round in the wash. We saw some that the sharks and the birds were fighting over. They told the story.

It was all over. We shook out our sail, set the ugly little god back in the bottom of the boat, took our places, spat on our hands, and—heave yo!—made our course for Maui and the white beach of Lahaina.

As we turned, I spied, some miles away, a ship that was forelaying us, cruising up and down. She was an old-fashioned bark, and as I looked at her more careful, I see she was the old

Corinthian. It seems that smart aleck of a mate of mine, finding himself in command, decided, after he'd taken the men ashore, to do a little whaling under his own private authority. And picking up this old thousand year whale, he sailed after him. What's more, he got him, as I learned later. For once that mate done something good! I give him credit for it.

Maybe 'twasn't such a sporting thing to kill that old whale, after all he'd done for us. You might think we could let him alone. But I'd have had a hard time explaining to the owners. We weren't in the whaling business for our health. Anyway, the mate got him. That's all there was to that.

But the *kahuna!* Say, how that old fakir could save his face I didn't understand. According to my idee 'twas the whale done it all. But Keawe thought different. As he looked at it everything was all right.

"The *kahuna* called to the whale and, far or near, the whale must needs obey."

"Oho!" I says. "So that's the way you figger it out?"

"Certainly, Cap'n Buckminster," says Keawe. "That's a *kahuna's* way."

"Well," I says, "the old man done it his own way, however it was. We'll let it go at that. I s'pose I may as well pay him the money. I have it here."

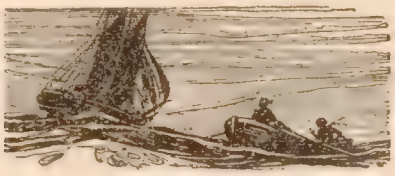
I guess that's the story, far as I recall it.

What's that you ask? Didn't the girl marry Keawe?

She did not. She married the mate! That blasted yallyhoot deserted me flat. He went to Mellish & Son in Honolulu, ship chandlers, and persuaded them to advance him three hundred dollars on his lay. With it he bought an interest in a small trading schooner, so I heard, sailed it back and forth among the islands and done quite a business. He died well off, I understand. His widow married again.

Who did she marry for her second husband? Well, I dunno 's I ever heard. I never give it a thought.

Was it Keawe? Well, now, that idee never occurred to me. Now you bring it to mind I shouldn't wonder if 'twas so. Yes, I rather guess she did. Likely she married Keawe at last!



COLD STEEL

A Story of the Legion

By GEORGES SURDEZ

FORBACH was well known in the Foreign Legion. Marshal Lyautey, military governor of Morocco, had once called him from formation, after a review at Fez, to present him to a party of official visitors.

"Rudolph Forbach, of the Legion. He was with me in the Tonkin. I was middle aged, listening to my first bullets, and he was young, hearing old music! Forbach, ladies and gentlemen, Adjutant Forbach—a Legionnaire of the grand epoch!"

The Alsatian was a gigantic, bony man, with long limbs. Once deemed the handsomest man in his regiment, his head was covered with thick, fur-like gray hair and his dissipated, tanned face was lighted by child-like, innocent blue eyes. Esteemed in Legion history, his span was tremendous. His first important campaign had been Dahomey; he often told of fighting against the Amazons of King Behanzin. He had followed Gallieni and Lyautey in Tonkin and Madagascar and, already a veteran, had witnessed the decorating of the First Regiment's flag in 1906.

Men who had been his company commanders, his lieutenants, were colonels and generals. Often a staff automobile would stop beside the marching battalion, and officers with white mustaches, medals glittering on their chests, would leap out to greet Forbach.

"My good old Rudolph! Still solid and on the job?"

"I carry on, *mon Général.*"

He was somewhat erratic in his conduct, because he had the self-righteousness of old soldiers. His unkind critics attributed his peculiarities to indulgence in white wine. They pointed out that from three to six quarts a day pouring down a man's throat, year after year, might well affect his brain. But those who really knew him said that his conceit came from the fact that he consid-

ered the Legion his family. Having enlisted at sixteen and having stayed with the Corps since, he could recall little else.

He was perhaps fifty-three; but to men who averaged two years under thirty, to his second in command at Ain-el-Rab, Middle Atlas, he appeared to be a patriarch. He was laughed at occasionally, hated at times, but granted a sort of awed veneration.

There were forty-odd Legionnaires stationed at Ain-el-Rab, which was not a military post, not even a blockhouse, but a mere hamlet on the sloping bank of a narrow torrent slashing across a valley; a huddle of mud built huts, swarming with flies, swept by the dusty wind. There was little for the soldiers to do, even less to drink. At best, there would have been sulkiness and rancor; but, with Forbach in charge, all would have been well had not Lieutenant Lavoine of the Colonial Infantry arrived to supervise them.

To start with, the Legion detachment was isolated from other units of the Corps, for the sector of Ait-Bazza had been taken over by the Native Infantry upon completion of the outposts. The men were casuals, members of various groups of specialized workmen left behind to do construction work when their companies had evacuated, and had been reassembled into a military formation for the need of the moment. The neighboring tribes, although severely handled in a recent campaign, were showing signs of discontent with the approach of Summer. Ain-el-Rab closed an outlet badly guarded by Blockhouse No. 4 on one side and Guard Tower No. 9 on the other. The Legionnaires were a sort of cork in a bottle's neck.

They obtained supplies from Blockhouse 4, but as it was occupied by Native Infantry and a traditional rivalry existed between the Legion and the Tirailleurs, food was doled out to them grudgingly, and they seldom were issued their rightful allowance of wine. Forbach had cheered them up, promising that he would obtain their recall from regimental headquarters at Meknes, and pointing out to them that all their protestations brought pure joy to the infantrymen.

"Can't last forever. Look at me! How many dirty holes do you think I've been in? Plenty one day, starvation the next—that's the Legion."

Forbach rather enjoyed himself. His rank of adjutant, peculiar to the French Army, placed him midway between sergeant-chiefs and sub-lieutenants. He had many privileges, and independent command was pleasing to his pride. It looked well to have his mail addressed—Post Commander, Ain-el-Rab. He had ordered the yards cleaned, loopholes knocked in the walls, organized a routine of patrols and detailed hunting parties to bring in game that amply made up for the shortage of canned meats. As he often told his second, Cambard, an ambitious young chap of twenty-four, all this reminded him of outpost life on the Chinese border.

His life's great burden, paper work, was taken from his shoulders by Cambard, who enjoyed it and would relax from adding columns of figures and composing reports by opening his textbooks and studying for a commission. The Legionnaires were, almost without exception, disciplined, clean men who made little trouble when sober and had little opportunity to get drunk.

FORBACH was returning from a patrol in the valley one afternoon when Cambard, perspiring, out of breath, much excited, met him two hundred yards from the first houses of Ain-el-Rab.

"Listen, Rudolph, keep your temper! An officer's come—fellow named Lavoine, of the Tirailleurs. Says the major commanding the region has put him in charge—"

"They may want to establish a more important post here," Forbach pointed out, "and he's come to investigate just how—"

"No. He's come to make trouble, Rudolph."

"Trouble? What for?"

"You remember that row you had with the major?"

"Sure."

Forbach shrugged. Before his detachment had been assigned to Ain-el-Rab, the major in command of the Ait-Bazza sector had ordered the Legionnaires to replace a half company of his own battalion in the quarries. The adjutant had obeyed, naturally, but had communicated with his colonel, as was his duty. And the Legion officer had telegraphed that, the detachment being composed of specialized workmen, the men should be employed at their trades or as a military unit. This was a small quarrel, of a type not known in any army, and the adjutant had thought nothing more of it.

"You remember," Cambard went on, "I told you at the time that the Old Man had it in for you. Blames you for making a kick, and can't see it's his fault for not obtaining authorization first from the regiment. You wouldn't listen to me when I told you what the sergeants at Ait-Bazza told me. The mess orderlies repeated to them that he said he would teach you not to—"

"Teach me?" Forbach stiffened. "Say, I have been in the army longer than he has. If any guy comes along after thirty-four years and can teach me— So you think this Lavoine wants to make trouble for me? I'll show him where."

Forbach had been let alone by officers for many years. In the Legion it was well known that he knew regulations and traditions much too well to risk punishment, and that his speeches and his actions would be upheld. As a general rule, officers outside the Legion avoided contact with him because he had a sharp tongue, was sensitive and usually could find high placed friends to intercede in his favor. That the major should forget this was a great blow to his pride. And if there was anything that Forbach never avoided, it was trouble. To him, caution smacked of cowardice, and cowardice was much worse than murder.

"That's what I'm afraid of," Cambard protested. "You're so hot headed! Listen, there's one thing neither you nor anybody else can get away with, and that's insubordination. When I say they're out to get you, I mean they're out to get the Legion, because they know how proud we are of you in the outfit. He'll give so many orders that you'll get sore, and you'll interfere for the sake of the men—and there he'll have you. Your pension is due soon, anyway, and they'd like nothing better than to have it rushed through for 'the good of the service'."

Forbach paused thoughtfully. Cambard was right. Lavoine would have much on his side to counter any argument; he would say that Forbach, a veteran, had been too conceited to obey, and that even those who protected him knew well that the adjutant sought trouble wherever he came in contact with members of other units. Over and above him, the major and Lavoine sought to strike at the colonel who had backed him up. Forcing Forbach before a disciplinary council would amount to proving the regimental commander wrong.

"You're not so dull, Cambard," the Alsatian admitted. "What happened?"

"He came with the supply trucks, and naturally, after the lorries had gone down the trail, I went back to the office, for I didn't see him alight. He came in, started bellowing at me for not guarding the place more carefully, said that a hundred men could have entered just as he had. Then, before I could get out to warn you, he had everything changed in the office. Took your table for himself right away and had your greatcoat taken to your quarters. Yelled because we were using part of the room as a clothes closet and supply store for noncoms. And he said to get you at once so that he could tell you

what he thought of the way things were run."

"All right," Forbach snapped. "Come along. I'll show *you* something."

The proper plan had been formulated in his mind instantly. He entered the office, stood at attention after saluting, and, although he grew red under Lavoine's hard stare sweeping him from head to foot, introduced himself briskly—

"Adjutant Forbach, post commander, Lieutenant."

As he spoke, he recalled that he had seen and heard of Lavoine before. The man was not liked in his own regiment. He was tall, slender, with a slight stoop, and appeared almost forty. He had thick yellow hair and protruding blue eyes; the rest of his face was all bony chin and jaws.

"That's not quite accurate now," he stated, softly. "I am in charge here, Lieutenant Lavoine. You shall learn to know me as a just chief, but one who will not tolerate sloth. My first impression is very bad. No sergeant to meet the convoy of trucks; sentries seated and smoking. I understood that you were an old Legionnaire, and everywhere I hear nothing except 'Legion cleanliness'. I come here unannounced. I enter this office like a café. Everything is slack, dirty, filthy, disgusting. Your men look like the forty thieves. A sow could not find her offspring in your yards. Things will have to change, to snap up, immediately."

Forbach could have explained that the moment when a convoy of trucks passed the hamlet might be called a respite for the sentries, who knew, from the presence of the machines and the troops protecting them that they were safe from surprise. And he could have asked Lavoine how he could contrive to keep dust away when every shift of the wind brought in additional quantities from outside. But this would have been a departure from the system he had decided to adopt.

"At your orders, Lieutenant," he said simply, staring straight ahead.

"No explanations to offer?"

"None, Lieutenant. I am sorry. We'll try to do better."

"Eh—you're Adjutant Forbach?" Lavoine asked.

"Yes, Lieutenant. At your service."

Lavoine was evidently puzzled, helpless. His whirlwind attack had dashed itself into thin air. There was nothing that he could punish Forbach for, as no instructions had been issued for the routine of the outpost.

"Dismissed."

Outside, Forbach smote Cambard on the back.

"See? From now on everything he says is correct. I've seen the trick work before. He'll get sick of it long before we will."

Cambard, less experienced, seemed doubtful. He believed, it was evident, that an officer was accustomed to silence and prompt obedience and would notice nothing unusual. But Forbach was sure of the result.

NEITHER the adjutant nor Cambard spoke to the men, but in some mysterious fashion all caught Forbach's cue at once. Perhaps an orderly had lingered to listen at the door. And it was an odd spectacle, that afternoon, to see Lavoine stalk angrily, grumbling and swearing, before respectful soldiers who accepted the most unjust reproaches without offer of explanation or visible resentment.

The lieutenant, who had come prepared to face mutinous, sulky men—he knew that Legionnaires would resent the sending of an outsider to command them—found privates carrying out orders at the double. The chap he indicated as orderly, a hard faced, dignified soldier wearing the military medal, accepted instantly and took care of his belongings as if he had been a Legion officer. When his old mare arrived the following day, a man volunteered to care for her, and she was attended to

like a racing thoroughbred.

Within two days, Lavoine's face was a constant purple from repressed rage. He felt himself unpopular, was aware that the men laughed at him behind his back, but had no opportunity to make a single remark. He tried to get a single man to break, to talk back and, when he failed in this, tried to win one over as an informer with money and privileges. The private took the bill, thanked him for the favors, but did not appear to understand what was expected of him in return.

During the third night Lavoine ordered the men out for inspection at three. The Legionnaires tumbled out, lined up in the yard, without an oath, a protest, or the least hint of anger. Miraculously, each one had his brushes, his reserve rations and the regulation number of cartridges.

"They look like Ali Baba's forty thieves," Lavoine said again, in desperation. "I want them shaved tomorrow morning."

And he was greeted at drill, during the forenoon, by forty shaven faces. Mustaches and beards carefully raised for weeks had been sacrificed without a whimper. Lavoine could find nothing to say. But he led them out for a practise march, with full kit. This was greatly needed, according to him, although each private walked sixteen miles every other day on patrol or hunting detail. He took them along the trails for forty kilometers, doing route step and march in formation at irregular intervals. When the water ran short, he quickened the pace. When he spotted a man perspiring, lagging behind, he would trot his mare to his side, lean from the saddle, saying:

"Come on—you're wonderful marchers in the Legion! Why, in my old company, no man ever shows fatigue, and we're nothing but ordinary soldiers!"

Swinging back to their quarters, the men sang; athletic games were organized during the evening: Lavoine had failed to break their spirit. On the fifth day he ordered all peddlers away, stating that they were spies; and the men were short of liquids, soap and tobacco. Good humor seemed to prevail, nevertheless. The lieutenant could not understand it.

He tried to break young Cambard that evening, to tease him into a hasty word or gesture. He knew the affection linking the two noncoms, felt that Forbach would break his reserve to assist his friend. Or perhaps Lavoine no longer desired to punish any one, but felt himself in honor bound to win the odd game forced upon him.

"Cambard, come here."

The sergeant crossed the office, came to attention. He knew what to do, for there was a tacit code. One was presumed to answer questions fully, never volunteering a word.

"You are a Frenchman, Cambard? Thought so. Very intelligent man. Working for a commission, eh? Enlisted on impulse, to get away from some trouble or other? A girl?"

Cambard had failed in the written examinations for military school, because, sent to Paris with much money and little control, he had frequented cafés more often than *lycées*. Instead of waiting for the next year's examinations, he had decided to go through the ranks to achieve his goal, and the Legion had seemed obvious as the best place to learn. But Lavoine, at Ain-el-Rab, was always right.

"Yes, Lieutenant, a girl."

"Have a cigaret?" Lavoine pushed the box forward. Cambard was puzzled, then decided to accept. "Tell me, is this an unusual group of Legionnaires, or are they like others?"

"They're an average lot, Lieutenant."

"Why, they're no trouble at all—eh!" Lavoine lifted his voice, snarled, "Don't light that cigaret in here! You presume on my kindness. I have given orders against smoking in the office. I gave you that cigaret to smoke when off duty."

Cambard started, was about to toss

the cigaret on the table. But this was not the game. He drew out a case of hammered silver banded with gold and carefully stored the smoke.

"I thank you, Lieutenant."

"You may leave, Cambard," said Lavoine, who seemed somewhat ashamed of himself.

It was on the sixth day that he struck an angle of attack that could not be laughed off. He posted an order, stating that some of the men were in the habit of cutting up bullets into tiny fragments, to bring down small birds; this process injured the rifling. He concluded that, lest the order be ignored or evaded, all hunting was forbidden. And he reminded them all that unauthorized use of cartridges was a court-martial offense. All patrol leaders would be held responsible if any one of their men lacked his supply of ammunition, held to account for the last cartridge.

The men turned the difficulty at first by hiring shotguns from natives. Lavoine ruled against it, explaining that it was likely to bring the men in contact with civilians for the purpose of plotting desertion. This was ridiculous, but would hold good until investigated.

On the eighth day of Lavoine's reign one of the patrols brought in a large wild boar, already cut to pieces. Lavoine emerged from the office, ordered the men to open their pouches and show their cartridges. He sniffed at the guns. Finding no cartridges missing, he ordered a general checkup. Without result. And when he stood, raging and powerless, Corporal Barlier, known far and wide as a cold-blooded humorist, strode forward to explain.

"Lieutenant, we were walking along the trail, when this boar breaks from the bushes and rushes by. Without thinking of anything in particular, mechanically as it were, I let him have it. Down he went, stone dead! Then I began to think it would be shameful to waste the meat. Had it chopped up and brought along." The corporal drew his bayonet from the scabbard, clean and oily. "Didn't hurt my blade, Lieutenant."

Lavoine squatted to seek for bullet holes. But he realized how foolish this close scrutiny seemed, for Legionnaires were past masters at camouflage. And the next day the patrols returned as usual, bags stuffed with quail and other birds, with hares, all presumably dropped with stones. The officer guessed what was happening, that the men were purchasing cartridges from the soldiers of the patrols coming from the blockhouse. But he could do nothing about it, and thus allowed matters to go smoothly for more than a week.

"He's done for," Cambard suggested.

"Not him; I know the type," Forbach replied. "Listen, Cambard, I'm doing this for the Legion. But the swine will pay for it. I have only a few more months to serve, then I get pensioned. I'll find him again, after that!"

Cambard, who wore the crossed swords of a master-fencer and had taught athletics, would have hesitated to tackle the older man. He sighed, probably at the thought that he was unlikely to witness the encounter. It would be a scene worth witnessing, one that would live long in Legion yarns.

During the feud the men at Ain-el-Rab had forgotten the political situation, which was growing tense. And they were startled when a runner came from the blockhouse one morning, rushing into the office.

LAVOINE came out almost immediately, beckoned to the bugler and ordered him to get the men together. Then he addressed Forbach and Cambard:

"Negotiations are attempted with the tribes, but planes are reporting masses of natives in the ravines south of us. From inside information just communicated all outposts, an attack is planned for tomorrow or the following day. A show of force is expected to delay their action, and give time for reenforcements to arrive from Meknes. For our

part, we are to make a demonstration in the general direction of Guard Tower 9, then return here, pack our stuff and move up to the blockhouse until trucks come to take us eastward. As soon as the patrols are back, inform me, and we can make the demonstration."

"They've noticed the blockhouse's signal, Lieutenant, and are coming in now," Cambard said. He indicated the white walls of the small fort on a distant hill. A red Bengal flare was recalling fatigue parties and patrols.

"All right," Lavoine agreed. He lighted a cigaret, waited until the returning Legionnaires had lined up with the others, then uttered an unexpected order, "Attention—inspection!"

He strolled down the line, flicking a pouch open, pulling a knapsack suspender, criticizing the distribution of weight elsewhere. He appeared absorbed, tense, lighted by some strong inner joy.

The men were in splendid condition, light khakis washed and scrubbed almost white, boots shining, buttons agleam. But they were all a trifle gaunt and worried. For several days they had lived in an atmosphere of madness. Forty-odd men playing a game against one who was powerful; forty-odd men scolded, held down, deprived of liberties, prey to boredom, milling endlessly under the ardent sun, shifting piles of dirt from one spot to another.

Taking advantage of a Legion ban on certain publications, Lavoine had withheld all books, magazines and newspapers printed in foreign languages. And he had revived an old regulation against the playing of cards for money. The change in habits, the constant oppression, had driven some of the younger privates to the verge of nervous collapse, and many showed twitching faces.

Lavoine himself showed the strain. He had been too nervous to sleep more than a few hours at a stretch, had not eaten much. But now he apparently had regained a measure of spirit.

Forbach understood why when the officer reached the men of the returning patrols. They had come in excited, because of the signals, had probably neglected ordinary precautions, lulled as they were by Lavoine's recent indifference. The adjutant knew his suspicions would be confirmed when the lieutenant ordered them to slide back the bolts of their rifles, to open their pouches.

"This rifle has been fired," Lavoine announced, addressing a private. Without hesitation he unbuckled the fellow's canvas bag, brought out a hare. "Shot, this time. You had a warning, my lad. Sergeant, take his name and make a report—deterioration of government material, waste of ammunition. If you get away with less than six months, I'll marry your sister."

The man's jaws quivered; muscles lumped his pale skin. But his eyes remained straight ahead, as if he had not heard. Lavoine chuckled with pleasure, went to the next man and produced a brace of birds from his bag, sniffed his rifle.

"This one, also! Sergeant, his name and a report, please."

Forbach kept steady with an effort. Lavoine was winning, had turned the game into a debacle for the Legionnaires. For one of the rules had been to avoid giving the officer opportunities to inflict severe punishment. The men stirred restlessly, a wind of revolt swept them, but the adjutant steadied them with his example. For the moment Lavoine held the upper hand.

"So much for these two," the lieutenant resumed in a brisk tone. "As for the rest, I am going to give you all a lesson in discipline and obedience. When troopers are untrustworthy, won't carry out orders, they should not be armed. Today we are marching out on a demonstration, without cartridges! Corporals, gather the ammunition. I have sent for a squad of Tirailleurs to guard them here for you. Legionnaires, you shall promenade before the enemy without cartridges because you misused those trusted to you!"

As he spoke, Lavoine lashed his leggings with his riding stick; then watched, whistling between his teeth as the order was carried out. He was deriving intense satisfaction from the incident, knowing what a humiliation it inflicted upon the men, for it was not merely a sort of unofficial degradation, but it was schoolboys' punishment. Lavoine would relate this story and it would spread. This would expose every member of the detachment to ridicule for the length of his stay in the Legion. And it would be greeted as a good joke on the Corps itself.

"What if we are attacked, Lieutenant?" Forbach asked.

"No attack until tomorrow. Information is sure."

"Information is never sure in Morocco, Lieutenant."

Lavoine hesitated; vague dismay rose in his eyes. But for his pride, he would have reconsidered, for he had been in Africa long enough to be aware that the natives seemed inspired by a sixth sense for propitious undertakings at small risks. However, he had spoken, and the joke was too good to spoil—forty-odd Legionnaires walking before a foe, without cartridges!

"If we are attacked, Adjutant? Why, you men are Legionnaires and fond of cold steel! You use bayonets so well against boars that much less tough, less mobile targets, such as human foes, can offer no serious problem."

Forbach did not insist. After all, his responsibility was covered and, like the majority of veteran noncoms, he dreaded responsibility worse than death. The demonstration would not take them more than three miles from Ain-el-Rab and, in an emergency, they could fall back rapidly. Should he make a fuss, it would only expose the whole regiment to more ridicule.

"Adjutant, the order is for you also. And you, Sergeant."

The two obeyed. Forbach was puzzled more and more, for he did not know whether this was one of the cases provided for in regulations, when an inferior has not only the right but the duty to assume initiative and interfere with a chief. But Lavoine was neither drunk, ill nor insane.

And should the demonstration be carried out without incident, many would uphold his decision as correct. Such measures were recommended to obtain a grip on sulky, undisciplined men. At Charleroi, during the first days of the World War, a colonel had ordered his battalions to drill under fire until the men steadied to their job. The story of the North African conquest offered several similar episodes.

AS SOON as the squad of Native Infantry arrived to guard supplies and ammunition, the detachment marched out behind Lavoine. The day was clear, there was nothing different in the atmosphere; but Forbach knew that every man in the detachment felt as he did, oddly light, unprotected, nude. The familiar weight of the cartridges was missing. The rifle, usually a source of comfort, had become merely a stick. Legionnaires fingered the smooth, dark walnut stocks feverishly. The air seemed filled with a choking menace.

"Wonder if we'll manage to get a boar." Lavoine bent from the saddle to speak banteringly to Forbach. "I have been curious to see just how it was done."

They reached the foot of the slope on which stood Guard Tower 9. It was identical in structure to such small forts in the Middle Atlas, resembling a gigantic, up-ended match box made of concrete, surrounded by a few strands of barbed wire. Four to six men were stationed there, relieved every three days. No sign of the enemy was seen on the way, and the planes, which had been soaring overhead shortly after dawn, had vanished.

When the halt was called, the Legionnaires breathed easier, for when Lavoine gave the next order they would

be within an hour's march of their cartridges. But the lieutenant dismounted, stretched his legs, grinned.

"We'll rest. Stack arms."

The men obeyed; but although they sat down or sprawled on the grass with outward indifference, they could not keep their eyes from wandering from the officer to their empty rifles. This halt was another humiliation. Forbach became worried, thinking that a prolonged stay might puzzle the enemy's spies, doubtless concealed in the bushes of the distant slopes.

"Barlier!" Lavoine beckoned to the corporal, handed him a small stone. "I don't expect you to find a boar—but surely you can locate a rabbit, one single, little rabbit? Use this to kill it."

Barlier saluted, accepted the pebble and strode some distance from the rest, pretending to be waiting for game. This made a bizarre scene, these men exchanging joking words without a smile, with the consequent undercurrent of mirth flowing through their nervousness. Without orders, at the risk of displeasing the officer, Forbach detached four men to points of vantage. He missed the ordinary routine, the placing of automatic riflemen, the alert, cheering self-confidence of the men.

"An hour should be enough," Lavoine said, glancing at his watch. "Seventeen minutes left, Adjutant."

Cambard saw that the officer was perspiring. He understood that the tension was severe for Lavoine. In case of trouble, the officer would have a difficult explanation to make to his chiefs. But Lavoine evidently possessed a certain type of courage. He was willing to gamble his career for pride. He reasoned, very likely, that the natives could not know that the Legionnaires were without ammunition, therefore would not attack before the day scheduled for their onrush.

Several men rose, pointed. Another green Bengal flare lifted from Blockhouse 4. Then one of the sentries posted by Forbach returned, reported that armed men were scrambling down the slopes. A plane appeared, circled above the blockhouse several times. Something must have occurred to cause this agitation.

"Halt over," Lavoine snapped.

Forbach consulted his watch and saw that the waiting time had been cut eight minutes. The men hastily formed threes and marched away.

"The hills are swarming with natives," a Legionnaire shouted.

"The plane—look! The plane is coming down on us!"

Some of the men who had served in the World War broke ranks and dodged into the bushes beside the trail as the machine swooped low over their heads. The reconstruction of the scene had been too exact for their quivering nerves, and they expected the ripping of a machine gun, the explosions of air bombs to follow. Forbach was glad, for the moment, that no rifle had been loaded.

"Message! He's dropped a message!"

Barlier was running down the trail to pick up a note fastened around a bit of metal with an elastic.

The men were straggling back to formation, shamefaced, grinning, as the lieutenant unfolded the paper. He scanned it rapidly, passed one hand over his lips in an unconscious gesture of dismay, and handed it to Forbach.

The adjutant read it, stammering the words, for he could not read in silence. The news spread from one end of the detachment to the other.

"Blockhouse signals enemy closing on guard tower. Six men within short of food and water. Beg you assure their immediate relief and withdrawal to blockhouse."

There were men up there, six men who counted on the Legion for salvation. Forbach saw forming in the faces of his soldiers his own desperate resolution. It would be madness, absurd self-sacrifice, but the Legion had never been looked to in vain. A surge of unreasoning heroism swept them all.

"We must go back and get ammunition," Lavoine broke in, dully.

"Would mean two hours," Forbach protested. "The slobs will have closed in by that time and it will be too late."

"No cartridges—can't be helped, Adjutant."

"Can't be helped?" Forbach laughed loudly, all irresolution wiped out.

His powerful hands ripped Lavoine from the saddle, and at the same time he kicked the mare in the belly. She galloped away toward Ain-el-Rab. Then the adjutant took the revolver from his chief's holster and slid it into his tunic.

"You can make monkeys out of us, you can march us out without cartridges, but you can't make the Legion quit those boys up there! There's no time to go for cartridges? All right! We'll go without them." Forbach laughed louder. "You wanted to see Legionnaires use the bayonet? Come along and see. Cold steel? Splendid!"

He turned to the Legionnaires.

"What do you say? Do we go up there with the forks and bring those fellows out?"

For answer, the men whirled about and ran in the direction they had come from, with a sort of fervent, almost drunken verve, sweating, grinning. It was one of the moments when life meant little. And Forbach, urging Lavoine before him, knew that it was for such things they had come; that reckless self-sacrifice and high venture had been the lure to draw them from all corners of the world.

Suddenly the men's faces set; a strange, ominous calm came over them. The automatic rifle in the tower had opened fire. The enemy was near. Forbach ran easily, his brain numbed. With forty men properly armed, there would have been every chance of success. As it was, he felt it would be a useless gesture. But that gesture had to be made.

The first shot was fired at them, more shots; the first man fell. Forbach was beside him in two leaps, picked up the bayoneted rifle. He signaled to Cambard to take the right of the line.

"Down awhile, everybody. Get your breath before starting up that slope! There are cartridges in the tower, and we can kid them a few minutes that we're holding our fire!" He knelt himself, breathed deeply. Then he was up, lifted his hands. "Fix bayonets! *En avant, la Légion!*"

The bugler slung his rifle, as steel bristled along the line. He wiped his lips with the back of one hand, brushed the mouthpiece of his instrument against his trousers. Then the sprightly, ardent notes of the charge resounded. Forbach went in the lead, one hand on Lavoine's shoulder. A scattering of shots greeted them, and hillmen were seen running, at startling speed, rifles swinging low as they crouched.

"They know!" Barlier shouted. "Look at them coming at us in the open!"

Whether by instinct or reasoning, the mountain warriors had guessed that the rifles of the detachment were useless. Their own guns emptied, instead of dodging to cover to reload as usual, they closed in with knives, clubs and rifle butts. They appeared greedy for close conflict with these men who had so often mowed them down at long range with the deadly precision of their bullets.

"Lie down when they're close in," Forbach called to Lavoine, suddenly remembering that the officer was altogether unarmed.

And he hurled him to the ground as the first opponent leaped at them from behind a bush. At the same moment the two parties clashed along the entire line, men whirled nearby, but Forbach could pay no heed to them.

As always in bayonet fighting, he felt that he was living in a nightmare, both his own movements and those of his foe seeming unreal, utterly deliberate and slow. He saw the straight, needle-like blade of a home-made dagger come in sight beneath the rifle's bole, which

the native clutched with one hand. The point rose toward his chest. And his own right hand traveled to meet a wrist, his fingers gripped a bony forearm. The warrior's face was very near his eyes, and he saw the contraction of his effort in the gathering muscles of his jaws, saw flecks of spittle clinging to the straggling beard and mustache.

At the same time there rose in his mind a contrasting picture of himself, his face tense and suddenly white, contorting with hatred and terror, for he was afraid, mortally afraid of the steel, as all men are at heart, and knew that in his eyes could be read the same speculation he read in those of his enemy. In a few seconds who would be alive?

The arm rose resistlessly; the blade ripped through the thin cloth. He felt the touch of the metal on his bare flesh. But the blade rasped on an obstacle, the revolver in his tunic, then tore through the garment, unstained. Forbach's left hand ripped the rifle from the other's grasp. The weapon hurtled back until the handle of the bayonet was firm in the adjutant's fist. And the Legionnaire stabbed upward as with a knife.

The mountaineer collapsed gently, as if his body had been hinged. Forbach looked about, saw men rising, and as they swayed their heads warily to seek new danger their eyes met his with dim recognition and intense astonishment that they were still alive. The adjutant saw Lavoine among them, clutching a curved knife. The fool had attacked a hillman with his bare hands—and had won! Bayonets jabbed, butts swung, crushing out tenacious life in men who refused to die.

FORBACH saw the barbed wire within two hundred yards.

But heedless of the shots fired upon them from the tower, the mountain people faced the Legionnaires. Both parties understood they were struggling for the same prize, the cases of reserve ammunition stored in the building.

"Into them!" Forbach shouted.

There was no need for him to push Lavoine now. The officer sped like a frightened hare. He had picked up a rifle and seemed avid to use the bayonet. He found what he sought, threw his whole weight into the blow, tumbled on his prone foe. When he rose, Forbach saw that his arms were red to the elbow, his tunic spattered with blood. Then the adjutant looked down at his own hands, and saw that they also were moist, sticky, red.

He took another deep breath and went ahead.

Again there was that confused, chaotic clash, the mêlée, with grunts, shouts, screams. Forbach was deafened by the detonation of a rifle close to his face, felt prickling burns on his neck and cheeks, while the stench of burnt powder filled his nostrils. The man who had missed him point-blank closed in. But this time Forbach was wary, and with a swift, deft motion he avoided the clutching fingers.

Forbach stepped to one side, as in the fencing drill, gained clearance, then rammed the blade home. Foolishly the other sought to ward off the lunge with one arm, and the twenty-two inch spike pierced through the biceps to reach the breast beyond.

A step backward to recover, and he was ready again. Some one clutched at his legs, and he reversed the rifle to smash down with the butt. It was a wounded Legionnaire groping for support. The adjutant shook him off. He could be picked up on the way down—if any one ever came down!

The air was filled with thunder, and the *tack-tack-tack* of a machine gun dominated the tumult, while an immense shadow swept the struggling men. The plane! The intervention of the aviators gave the Legionnaires a respite. They rushed upward.

Forbach tore his trousers on the wires, got through to the cleared space between it and the wall. Legionnaires

were knocking off the lids of boxes thrown to them from the platform; cartridges were tossed into eager hands.

"Where's the sergeant in charge?" Forbach called.

"Up here—come on in—"

Forbach entered the building. There was light in the small room, flooding through the trapdoor in the platform's flooring. Empty shells jerked out of the automatic rifle tumbled down, glittering, struck with sharp little clicks on the rungs of the ladder, clearly audible above the hammering detonations.

"Come down out of there. We've got to leave," Forbach shouted, "and that plane can't handle them forever."

"All right, coming down—just a few rounds more," the Tirailleur promised.

The Legionnaires outside were shooting rapidly. Forbach heaved a grunt of relief. With ammunition, the retreat could be covered, the wounded picked up. Success was a certainty with no greater risks involved than are usual in combat. Cambard came in, escorting Lavoine.

"He wants to see you." The sergeant held a handkerchief to his brow, which was slashed open. "Say, we left seventeen on the way up and—"

Lavoine pushed him aside violently to face Forbach. The lieutenant's face was grimy, and as he passed one hand over his eyes his tears mingled with the dust and soot on his face.

"You know it's up to me! Adjutant, an old soldier like you will understand. I can't face court-martial; I can't live with those lives on my conscience! This man is trying to keep me from it. He reasons—he reasons—"

"Cambard, get out and stay out. You're needed with the men," Forbach snapped. When the sergeant had left, he looked at the officer with quick sympathy. "I get you! You want your gun, eh?"

"My gun, yes, my gun."

"Listen, you've treated us rotten, but you behaved like a man on the way up. You're a soldier, and you get the gun." The veteran drew the weapon, an old-fashioned service revolver, from his tunic, removed five shells which he held in his hand, and presented it to Lavoine, butt first as was proper. "One cartridge 's enough."

"Thanks," the lieutenant whispered.

"Better wait until the guys upstairs have gone; the less they see the less they'll talk. Nobody'll know you did this yourself. I'll say you were hit."

The adjutant stood on the first rungs of the ladder, shouted:

"Eh, you, up there! Staying all day?"

When the sergeant and his automatic rifle crew had slid down and darted out of the door, Forbach nodded to Lavoine.

He knew that the officer hated him deeply, indirectly held him responsible for what had happened. And he wondered whether Lavoine would not chance shooting him down first, to take one of the remaining shells for himself later.

But Lavoine thought only of his own remissness, of the seventeen casualties he would have to account for before a court of brother officers. Despair and shame had wiped out thought and hatred.

Forbach heard the shot and mounted the stairs. Lavoine was dead. Forbach picked up the weapon, for arms must not be allowed to fall into the hands of the enemy. Then he turned toward the door to join his detachment. But before leaving he halted for a last duty. He turned, stood at attention and saluted.

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

A FEW words from Georges Surdez in connection with "Cold Steel", his story in this issue:

Beirut, Grand Liban

In my story, "Cold Steel", I state that Adjutant Forbach had been in the French Foreign Legion over thirty years. Yet a recent contest, managed by the Veterans of the Legion, to find "the Legionnaire with longest service", awarded the first prize to Corporal-Chief Hacker, of the First Regiment (twenty-four years, two months and fourteen days), the second prize to First-Class Legionnaire Vandesteen, of the same regiment (twenty-three years, four months and three days), and the third prize to First-Class Legionnaire Moll, same regiment (twenty-two years, three months and eighteen days).

It must be pointed out that the contest was limited to Legionnaires below the rank of sergeant. Christmas Eve, 1929, as guests of a Legion outfit, I sat between a sergeant-chief who had enlisted in 1896 and was still in active service and an officer who had been in the Corps nearly forty years. I met an adjutant who had been retired two years and had served in Madagascar during the pacification of the Island (1882).

Conditions have changed in the Legion as elsewhere, in the last eighteen months. For example, the creation of an independent regiment for the Tonkin was laughed at. I was told it was utterly impossible—and the Fifth Regiment of Foreign Infantry is in existence! In the matter of age, I believe the old non-coms will grow fewer and fewer: Many of them were Alsatians, who had run away from home to serve France rather than Germany. As the prospective

recruits were under police watch when they neared military age, the majority would leave at sixteen or seventeen, lie to the recruiting officer and enter the Legion. These men could not go back home—they would have been arrested and sentenced as deserters from the German Army—consquently they reenlisted after the first five years, and kept reenlisting until killed, invalided for sickness or severe wounds.

The prize granted Corporal-Chief Hacker was three hundred francs, or about twelve dollars. While that appears small at first glance, purchasing powers should be compared. For that amount, in North Africa, it is possible to buy fifty to sixty quarts of ordinary red wine, or twenty-four quarts of vintage wine, or twenty-four bottles of anisette, or twelve bottles of cognac, or ten quarts of champagne. With champagne retailing at thirty dollars a quart in the speakeasies of New York, it is easily understood that Hacker was given three hundred dollars in real value.

—GEORGES SURDEZ

AT THE moment of writing, Mr. Surdez, as indicated by the heading of the above, is traveling through Asia Minor. In spite of our limited space, it would be selfish of the staff not to pass on at least a portion of one of his letters to the office, in which he sets down some of his graphic observations:

". . . Contrasted with the Sahara, the Syrian Desert doesn't seem so stark. But there are many interesting things to glean concerning it. They have a Camel Corps out here, armored cars and various bodies of irregulars with fascinating stories and splendid uniforms.

"Damascus is a peculiar city—in many ways it resembles Marrakesh in Morocco. Naturally, everything is modernized, but enough of the old remains to make a stroll through the *souks*, some of them dating back to the Roman occupation, intriguing, particularly when one gets beyond the glass front affairs and to the open shops. I stood by for many minutes, watching an old oilcan turn into a coffee pot, to be sold to the visiting Bedouins. In the metal roofing of certain markets, shrapnel bullets made holes during the bombardment of 1926, and although things appear pretty well in hand now—only a little mess, a few days back, during the elections—this trivial evocation of a massacre makes you look into the swarthy faces of the mob with certain thoughts at the back of your head. For instance, that having one's throat slit is a poor pastime.

"Hundreds of camels in the *bled*, a good proportion splendid animals, comparing well with the choice mounts of the Saharan Meharistes. Gobs of picturesque stuff everywhere.

"NATURALLY, I hooked up with Legionnaires the first opportunity offered. There is only one battalion of the Corps left in Syria, at Homs—and a mounted company stationed at Palmyra. An acquaintance of mine, the youngest survivor of Djilani (Occidental Sahara) is on the corporal squad, wearing the Military Medal and the Colonial Cross and badge for his participation in that sad affair. He was a close friend of the young Legionnaire whose tale of the ambush appeared in Camp-fire. He has grown older and tougher, and derives no small prestige from having cut his teeth on that tough engagement.

"It is amusing and, in a fashion, heart-warming, to hear over again stories which I have already written for *Adventure*. The captain who was the hero of 'Come On, Zouaves!' was discussed, as he always is whenever Legionnaires gather. There was a former member of the third battalion, second regiment, and we went over the attack at the Iskrittens, with beer glasses, match-boxes and ash trays to indicate positions. Another had known the stork, hero of 'Khyada.' It was quite some time before I could get the talk on local topics—then came raids into the *bled*, fights in the Druse Hills, police work in Damascus, desertions, recaptures, gendarmes, and the escapades of old-timers while in hospitals and rest camps.

"MUCH pain was taken to teach me how to tell the new uniforms apart—The Grand Liban Republic has a battalion of Chasseurs du Liban, who wear khaki and the beret of the French Alpinists. There are Gendarmes who wear the Cedar badge on their képis; mounted irregulars in Syria proper who wear Caucasian fur bonnets and Cossack uniforms, including the dagger worn in the belt. There are bodies of troops armed with the French Lebel and the long, quadrangular bayonets; others armed with Mausers and German 'cabbage-slicers'. French troopers in tall white colonial helmets, Senegalese troopers from all over West Africa with the scarlet chechia, Tonkinese soldiers, Malgasy from Madagascar. And I heard a colored sub-lieutenant speak with the unmistakable French spoken in the West Indies.

"The French Mediterranean fleet is in the harbor—saw them off Palestine a few days ago. The big ships are not very impressive—old-timers with modernized superstructures, tripod masts, etc., and an airplane carrier which offers nothing new to the eye. But the smaller craft (destroyers and submarines) are evidently modern and efficient. Somebody or other seems to have understood the sea principle: to the First Power, the cannon, to the second—the torpedo. . ."

A READER looks critically at "gun talk" in our fiction. Since he doesn't mention explicit cases, we can't exactly place the fault, but the common errors he points out are worth noting anyway:

Orlando, Florida

I trust I am not unduly critical of the efforts of our Writers' Brigade. I can stand for steel jacketed bullets (which never existed), for snapping open the cylinder of an old single-action to see if it was loaded, even for shoving a new clip into an automatic *revolver*. But when a writer extends the range of the .45 auto cartridge to that of the .30 '06, by merely slipping it into a "Tommy", I have to sit up and growl. I would expect any pistol expert to obtain better accuracy at any range than is possible with a Tommy. The longer the range, the greater the superiority of the pistol. Of course, the Tommy is wonderfully effective against mass formations at short range. There are several other pistol cartridges more highly recommended by experts for long range work. If some of our writers will take a correspondence course under Donegan Wiggins they will cause less pain to us gun cranks and maybe become gun cranks themselves.

I got a smile out of the interest shown by the Sioux in the "shiny, brass cartridges" captured from Custer's men. I had it, first-hand, from one who was in Reno's detachment that they had much trouble from the badly corroded *copper* cases sticking in the chambers. They had to be knocked out with a ramrod, which reduced the effectiveness of their guns to about that of a muzzle-loader. Brass cases were comparatively new at that time and I believe were not yet in general use in the Army. I ran across those old copper cases as late as the '80's, and presume they can be found yet. Some of them looked like a rim-fire cartridge, having a centrally placed, inside primer.

AN ARTICLE published in *The American Rifleman* about a year ago gives the Sioux credit for the invention of the separate, center-fire primer. They inserted a piece of gravel in a percussion cap, reamed a hole in the base of the shell, inserted the cap and reloaded. Some of the cases were found or captured, sent to Washington, and the present primer for center-fire cartridges developed.

I wonder if Mr. Vestal can give us something about the reasons for Sitting Bull's return to the United States. I have always understood that those Sioux were not popular with the Canadian Indians or the Canadian authorities and that they were finally maneuvered out of Canada by the Northwest Mounted, without any serious fighting. I have read one very good story on the subject. Think I could stand more.

—E. G. ROGERS

THE tale of a whale who made a Canadian tour:

Havana, Cuba

Mr. Wetjen's remarks on whales on page 184 of your issue of 1st May are very interesting, but I think he did not know about a wretched whale that came up the St. Lawrence river as far as Montreal in the fall of 1905 or 1908—sorry I can not remember exact year, but as I came to Cuba in 1909, it was before 1909, and no doubt one of your Montreal readers will be writing about it to you. The whole town was very proud of the visit, and being fine weather, it was a good time to go out and try to kill it. The supposition was that the whale came up by mistake as far as Quebec, and did not know enough to turn back where the salt water ended, and kept coming till the Lachine Rapids a few miles above Montreal stopped it. Even then he could have gone back, but preferred to swim about below the big town, and when he died, stranded on the other side of the river, near a village called Longueuil, it was found riddled with bullets.

Some friends and myself went on a Sunday to the lower end of the town, and got several sights of the poor thing, when it came up to breathe. There were lots of small boats waiting in the strong current, with men armed from rifles to revolvers, and it was dangerous for the crowds along the shore—more so than for the whale, as firing was continuous all afternoon, and (I supposed) every day for several days. The whale was skinned and stuffed and on exhibition near a wharf for a long time, and one could see how punctured the skin was. It must have been 30 or 50 feet (I hate to say more) but it was the real thing, *huge*. As Montreal is I think 150 miles from Quebec, and the tide water does not come higher than Three Rivers on the St. Lawrence, if that far, I think "our whale" beat the one in the Columbia River a long way, especially when you think how long the river is below Quebec before you get to the sea.

—G. A. DUNLOP

DO WILD WEST conditions still prevail? Well, at least they do in Outback Australia, as this evidence from a New Zealand paper would indicate. It is sent in by Tom L. Mills, of the *Feilding (New Zealand) Star*, and member of our Ask Adventure department:

"An interesting story of how he outwitted cattle thieves was told by Mr. James Martin, manager of the Victoria Downs Station, who was visiting

Aukland, New Zealand's most northern city. The thieves had taken 200 of the station calves, which had not been branded. When Mr. Martin discovered the loss he set out with four black trackers on horseback. The calves were discovered in the Northern Territory, 300 miles away. Luckily a branded cow had followed her calf, and this gave the clue to the missing animals.

"When Mr. Martin and his trackers arrived they found that the calves were just leaving the branding pen of a wealthy man, who had received them from the thieves. This man was later arrested and imprisoned. Mr. Martin found that the actual thieves had been paid by cheque by the receiver, so he set off for the nearest town, a distance of 90 miles, to await their arrival with a posse of police. The case was a sensational one, and the thieves were all convicted and are still in gaol."

AND here's a bit more from Stanley Vestal, who, having started this most recent fracas on Sitting Bull and Custer, certainly deserves another word in the matter:

Norman, Oklahoma

I was interested to see in the issue for May 15th another contribution from Mr. Wells, of Oregon, in which he questions some of my statements regarding Sitting Bull's career. Most of the points he raises are, I believe, sufficiently disposed of in my book, slated to appear in September (Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston).

First, as to killing women and children by the Sioux, and the holier-than-thou attitude taken by Mr. Wells. I believe that a careful count will show that more Indian women and children were killed by white men on the Plains than white women and children by Indians. Slim Buttes and Wounded Knee and Sand Creek and the Fort Robinson killing of Dull Knife's people are cases in point. Barring the Minnesota Massacre (with which Sitting Bull had nothing to do) the Sioux had small chances of killing white women, for there were not many of them in the country inhabited by the hunting tribes. Nowadays army aviators think nothing of bombing cities and killing women and children; are these men members of "gangs of cutthroats?" A man is to be judged by the manner in which he lives up to his moral code, whatever it may be; not by the code for which the individual is not responsible. Sitting Bull, moreover, was noted for sparing captives and whites who fell into his hands: Little Assiniboine, Father De Smet, Frank Grouard, Tom Campbell, and a dozen others, including Fanny Kelly.

AS TO "medicine man" and "chief", every man who could, made medicine (in the sense of performing rituals, having visions, and so on), and Sitting Bull was like the rest, having a gift of prophecy which made him remarkable also. But there was no high degree of specialization among the Sioux. If sitting on a horse and thinking what to do next is "making medicine", then Sitting Bull was a medicine man, and Mr. Wells and I have no quarrel. Sitting Bull was a head-man of a band (the Icira) of Hunkpapa, of about sixty lodges; he was chief of the Strong Hearts, a warrior society, and later of several others; he was made head chief of the Hunkpapa (about 4000 souls) in 1867.

Later, when Red Cloud made peace, all the non-agency Sioux gathered about him, and before the Custer fight he was elected chief of all those he had summoned to his camp to fight the troops. A chief, of course, had little authority; a chieftaincy was a post of honor, rather than of power. White men crave power, but Indians care only for prestige. And a chief had no more power than his personality and his strong arm could enforce. That was why Uncle Sam insisted on three-fourths of the adult male Sioux agreeing to every treaty.

I NEVER supposed that Custer was daunted by four Cheyennes, but the Cheyennes did, and as my book is told from their standpoint, I noted the fact. As to Reno being so secure on his hill, Mr. Wells should consult General Godfrey's well known account of the business. Godfrey was there, and apparently he did not share Mr. Wells' optimism. As a matter of fact, some of the troops with Reno tried to go to Custer's relief, and were beaten back. The markers on the battlefield show this.

Frank Grouard's father was a white man; his mother a woman of the Sandwich Islands. Frank was raised among the whites, and as soon as he could escape from Sioux captivity returned to them, fought with them against the Indians, and lived with them until his death. I have understood that Kanakas from the Sandwich Islands are classified by anthropologists as belonging to the white race. In any case, in my book (where whites are opposed to Indians) Frank must fall under the head of whites—for practical purposes. This is explained in my book.

IT IS true that Indians did not often ride mules, but they were eager to get them for packing purposes. Sitting Bull captured a number from white men and other Indians at different times, and some he gave to his favorite sister. He would not have done this had she not valued mules. As to cottonwood bark forage, it is certainly true that Indians could not have fed all their stock on such forage; that is why they lost so many head. As to the mild winters of Montana, I would like to quote Viljalmur Stefansson, the Arctic explorer, who stated in my hearing that he had never found any weather in the Arctic equal to the cold of his boyhood winters in Montana. Plenty of horses froze standing, and in some winters even buffalo. One winter, as the Historical Society of North Dakota reports, the horns of cattle burst with the cold. Horses paw through snow for grass, of course. Buffalo, however, shoved

it away with their noses; old hunters tell how the crust used to be marked with blood where buffalo had been rooting.

I had no intention of suggesting that the Sioux (only half of whom had guns) were the equal of Sergeant York or Yellowstone Kelly as marksmen. All I say is that they were better horsemen and shots than the soldiers. A host of officers have made public statements to this effect; if Mr. Wells cares to read a dandy book by P. E. Byrne, "Soldiers of the Plains", he will find all these statements gathered together for his information. Considering the kind of guns and ammunition the Sioux owned, they were remarkable shots, and better horsemen. In Finerty's "Warpath and Bivouac" (another dandy volume) Mr. Wells will find the statement of Major Walsh, of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, declaring that Sitting Bull's Sioux were far superior in both respects to the best cavalry regiments of England. Walsh knew the British army well. There were many rookies in the Army on the Plains (owing to the huge number of desertions in those days), men who had had very little training. The Sioux were all veterans, who had been fighting and riding all their lives. And when Custer wanted to fight his men, he had to dismount them, they couldn't hit anything from the saddle, whereas the Sioux made a living by shooting buffalo from the saddle.

AS TO the number of rounds fired when Sitting Bull was killed: The four thousand (?) rounds expended by the Police were not all fired in hand-to-hand fighting. Most of it was fired from cover after the two parties separated. And the first part of that fight was in the dark, and unexpected. At that, either the money spent on lead by Uncle Sam's Army is largely wasted, or that was mighty good shooting. In warfare a soldier could not begin to carry the lead that is required to kill him. Yet we have as good soldiers as anybody. Better, when it comes to rifle-fire.

Before one brands the Indian as a coward, one must know why he decided to fight—or run away The motives of white men and Indians are entirely different. Only one white officer I know of fought like the Sioux chief—T. E. Lawrence (see "Revolt in the Desert"). He usually went into battle with the understanding that there were to be "no casualties." He—and Sitting Bull—were not hard-boiled enough to send a pal to his death for the sake of a victory. An Indian leader was held personally responsible for his losses.

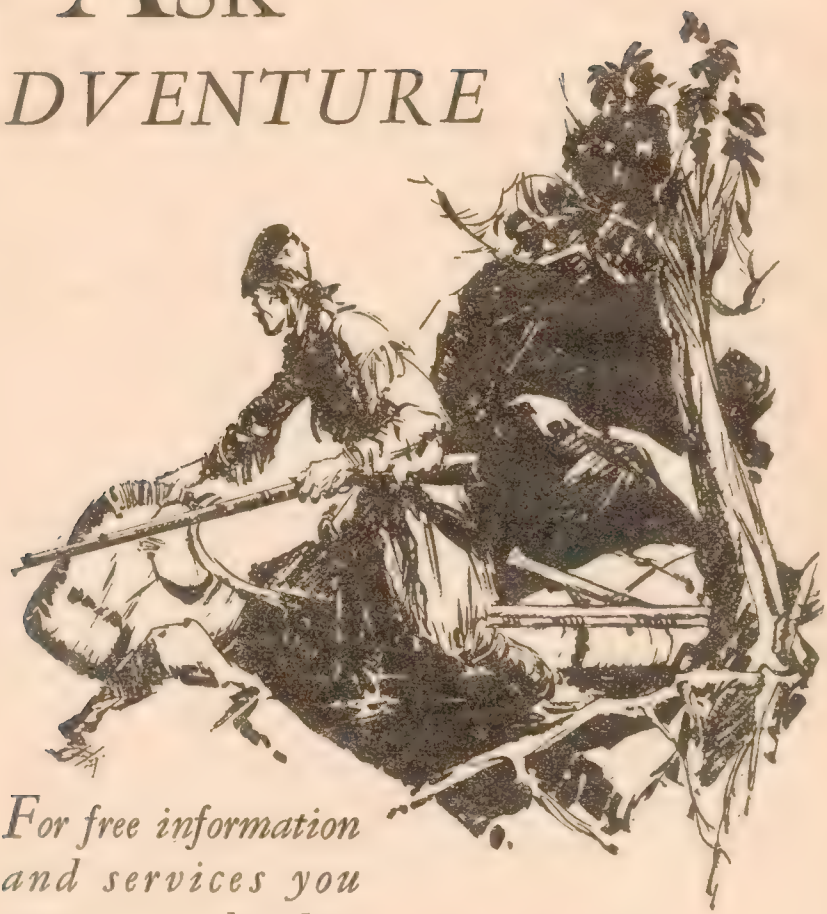
AS TO Indian customs of burial: Of course Indians always carried off their dead if they could. But a war party of men, several days or weeks from the home camp, never attempted to take their dead home. All they wished to do was to keep the enemy from scalping and mutilating their dead friends. And so, if they won the battle, they let the dead lie; if they lost it, they laid them out in some ravine nearby. At the Custer battle, where all the relatives were nearby and there were plenty of horses, the dead would naturally be taken along and buried at the end of four days' mourning, and it was four days to the Big Horn Mountains. Even so, not every dead man could be so taken care of. Some dead Sioux were left in the camp. Read the Indian (Army) scouts' accounts of what they found when they entered the abandoned camp after the Custer fight; you will find them in that interesting book, "The Arikara Narrative of the Campaign against Hostile Sioux, June 1876", in the Historical Collections of North Dakota. Therefore, the Sioux had that proverb—"It is better to lie naked than to rot on a scaffold." It meant that it was better to die in a victorious fight than to die in a defeat and be carried away and put on a scaffold, or die in the camp of sickness. Once in a blue moon some warrior would return to a battlefield and bring home the bones of a pal. But that was considered a most unusual instance of devotion. Of course, whenever possible, the man's horse was killed beside him, wherever he fell. My book contains instances of all these customs, and the stories of the fights in which they happened.

If I make Sitting Bull out a great man, it is because I think he was one. When I started out on this job, I rather hoped he would be as bad as Mr. Wells believes, for a book on such a subject sells more copies. But, hang it all, the old chief won me over. Maybe he can do the same with Mr. Wells next September, when my book appears. —STANLEY VESTAL

OUR Camp-fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstances.

If you are come to our Camp-fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There are no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

Ask Adventure



For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Great Bear Lake

A LIST of essentials to enable two men to live for one year in the Canadian Northwest mineral discovery field—compiled by our expert on the territory:

1 heater stove with oven; one camp stove, 24 by 20; set cooking utensils; 2 buckets; 2 hand basins for gold pans and washing; 2 axes; 2 spare handles; 2 small axes; 4 large files; 1 hand saw; 1 crosscut saw; 2 shovels; 1 hammer; 2 prospector picks; 2 ice picks; 4 12-in. butcher knives; 2 pocket knives; 2 skinning knives; 2 whetstones; 2 30-30 long rifles; 500 rounds shells; .22 rifle; 1000 shells; cleaning and repair tools for same; 20 lb. assorted nails; 1 roll isinglass for windows; 1 lb. tacks; ½ lb. canoe tacks; no revolvers; fishing tackle; 2 mirrors; 6 waterproof match boxes; snow glasses; 1 canvas covered freight canoe with outboard motor, 1 light canoe, 16 ft. for carrying over portages; 4 paddles, copper tipped.

1 good 8-in. duck tent; 2 ground sheets; cheese cloth for mosquitoes, etc.; 2 eiderdown sleeping bags; 2 spare blankets; 12 pr. socks; 6 smoke tanned moose hides for moccasins and mits; 4 pr. canvas high boots with rubber soles; 6 pr. overalls, ditto heavy underwear, ditto shirts; 2 housewifes well filled; 4 pr. snowshoes, Indian local (Edmonton) make; 1 lb. sewing sinew, local; 1 canoe track line; spare ½ in. rope, spare

canoe canvass and cement for repairs.

Grub—500 lb. flour; 100 lb. bacon; 100 lb. beans; 20 lb. pork, salt; 25 lb. sugar; 50 lb. lard; 50 lb. oatmeal; 25 lb. rice; 10 lb. syrup; 25 lb. sweetened milk powder; 12 lb. baking powder; 20 lb. each tea and coffee; dessicated potatoes and onions; 20 lb. raisins and apricots; 24 yeast cakes for sour dough.

50 lb. candles; 10 lb. soap; 2 lb. matches; 4 pipe lighters; tobacco and pipes; liquid cascara, medicines as desired; trapper's license and 10 traps; 10 cans gasoline, stove pipe, etc.

These can be added to as desired, but are all necessary and will make you fairly safe with a good knowldege of woodcraft.

Canoes will be loaded at ry. terminus for a 1400-mile downstream voyage to Ft. Norman, then up Bear River to Gt. Bear Lake. At Fitzgerald there is a 16-mile portage, but other bad places can be negotiated. Indians can be hired for the big portage.

Echo Bay will be the objective. Berries are plentiful; poor hunting, but splendid fishing. Great Bear Lake has trout up to 50 lb. Maps can be obtained from Bureau of Information, Edmonton, Alberta; also mining and game regulations; also much help from N. W. Police there. If you are experienced fellows with pluck, and can get such an outfit, you might find the waiting fortune. —C. PLOWDEN

Garvey

A CLAMMER'S boat built by rule of thumb.

Request:—"I am unable to locate any one who has plans for a 26′x6′ 'garvey,' the native type of clammer's boat of the Jersey Coast. There are plenty of Jersey boat builders, but they all work by the 6th sense. I would like to get plans and specifications."

—TOM BROMLEY, Palmyra, New Jersey

Reply, by Mr. Gerald T. White:—Garveys and similar locality boats are built by rule of thumb and no naval architect ever has a hand in it. If there was sufficient call for such plans, architects would study the type and then draw plans from the boats, reversing the usual procedure.

But there isn't enough demand for plans to make it worthwhile for the designers. The best thing I can offer, which certainly is not much, is that you find a garvey of about the right size and sketch up some plans from the boat. If you are not accustomed to such sketching you could probably find a draftsman out of work who would be glad enough to earn a five dollar bill for a couple of hours' work.

The garvey problem is also found in many other types. To the best of my experience I have never seen but one actual set of plans of the famous Gloucester dory. There are all sorts of modifications, of course. Also, until a few years ago when I collected data and drew some plans, there were no drawings in America of the famous Dutch "punters" which make ideal shoal water auxiliaries.

Until prohibition brought the Jersey seaskiff into prominence there were no plans of those boats. And so it goes.

Taxidermy

BEAUTY hints for a dead deer.

Request:—"Will you please tell me how to keep a deer's lips and eyelids from shrinking when they dry out?" —CHAS. S. KINNER,

—Rutherford Heighths, Pennsylvania

Reply, by Mr. Seth W. Bullock:—In treating the lips all cartilage must be removed and the surface skin scraped as thin as is possible. This is done purely to eliminate this shrinking. The lips are split and the skin peeled back as the inside membranes are removed, so that when the job is ready for final treatments there remains nothing but a shell, which is later packed with clay or plaster and shaped to appear as in life. You will appreciate that the thinner you get the lips the less shrinkage you will have. In other words, if you have done the job properly you can forget all worry about any shrinkage.

The same applies to the eyelids, as all interior parts of the head skin must be scraped thin.

Papua

A LAND where the planter must be a capitalist.

Request:—"I would like any information you can give me regarding ranching in Papua—price of land and opportunities."

—BUCK HOUSEHOLDER, Kearney, Nebraska

Reply, by Mr. L. P. B. Armit:—Ranching, as it is known in America, is unknown here. All agricultural settlement here is mostly in connection with the growth of coconuts, rubber, coffee, hemp, cocoa, and a few other things, and the initial outlay on these cultures is so high that planting, as it is termed here, is mostly a business for men and companies backed by a large amount of capital. A coconut plantation takes about eight years to reach the production stage, so you see that it would not be a payable business for a man with only very limited funds to try to start a coconut plantation. The same remark refers to the other products. Land is plentiful in both Papua and New Guinea (there are two separate colonies in the island of New Guinea; not to mention the big section of the same island that is owned by Holland.) In the two Australian administered colonies the land is mostly leasehold

tenure, the lease rents being very moderate; but the capital required to make a success of planting is not at all moderate.

If you are possessed of ample funds—and you will require very many thousands of dollars—you might find this part of the world a good place in which to invest your cash; but if you have only a small sum of money you will do better with it in your own homeland.

Birds' Nest Soup

A DELICACY to which the New World swifts do not contribute.

Request:—"Kindly send me information on birds' nests that are used by the Chinese for food.

I am making a trip to the Gulf of California this Summer and I desire to find if there are any economic possibilities in this article of diet. There are many Chinese on this coast."

—BENJAMIN H. SLOAN, Sawtelle, California

Reply, by Mr. Davis Quinn:—The birds whose nests are used for soup are about thirteen species of swifts, found in the Indo-Australian region and on interlying islands. In appearance, manner of flight, and habits, swifts somewhat resemble swallows, although the structure of these birds separates them into a different division (order) of birds from that in which ornithologists place the swallows. Some of the so-called "edible nest" swifts are: *Cypeselus esculentus* (occurs in Borneo); *Collocalia fuciphaga* (perhaps the most commonly collected edible nest species, occurs Java); *Collocalia troglodytes* (Philippines); also there is an esculent swift in Ceylon.

The nests of these birds (especially of *C. fuciphaga*) are built essentially of a clear mucus-like saliva, gummy and quick-drying. It is interesting to note that the salivary glands producing this secretion are remarkably developed during the period of nest building, after which they diminish leaving large cheek pouches to accommodate and store the countless small insects these birds catch on the wing. And by the way, swifts are not idly named; they are supposed to be the fastest flying of all birds. Now this secretion hardens into an agglutinated substance resembling many layers of translucent cellophane. When fresh and newly built, and free from feathers, dirt, etc., nests are known as "white" or first quality. This is the ingredient prized by Chinese epicures in birds' nest soup. "Brown" nests are those discolored by use, age, or by the admixture of foreign stuff—sticks, waste, etc. These nests are second grade and considered hardly worth collecting. Marketable value therefore depends on freshness, color and purity of nest.

The nests are crescent shaped, like half a saucer cemented to a perpendicular wall. They are commonly found in limestone caves, which the swifts colonize in great numbers, although occasionally they may be found on precipitous cliffs, in quarries or even in holes in the eaves of a building. The nests are usually sought in seaside caves by natives in a boat, with ladders, or by descending from above on ropes, a good number of nests being taken on each visit. These same caves are inhabited during the day by bats while the swifts are out on ceaseless flight for insects. If you should ever collect these nests be sure and allow a brood of young to develop before attempting to disturb them. This is safe insurance for a future supply.

There are many species of swifts that secrete the same prized saliva, but introduce twigs, grass, etc., into the construction of their nests to reenforce them, thus rendering the nest, from an epicurean viewpoint, a total flop. Such are the common swifts of North and South America. I do not know of a species of edible nest swift occurring in the New World. However, the possibility of introducing one or more of these interesting birds into the Western Hemisphere might be considered, although under present laws Federal permission would be first necessary, and the same would, I believe, apply in Mexico.

Canoe

PADDLER'S repair kit.

Request:—"What is the best way to repaint canoes, using not too expensive materials?"

—T. MILIUS, Thetford, Vermont

Reply, by Mr. Edgar S. Perkins:—Take off old paint with varnish remover and a scraper, or a strong lye solution; the former is the better If pores in canvas are open, use a coat of canoe filler, then a coat of good grade marine paint, after taking down the filler with a light grade of sandpaper. For looks and lasting wear a coat of varnish may be added over the paint.

Your repair kit is guided largely by the type of canoe you use. The ordinary kit contains pieces of canvas, silk, marine glue or waterproof glue, strong surgeon's tape and a few copper brads or tacks.

Washington

GOVERNMENT land, better for recreation than farming.

Request:—"I am interested in the central part of the State of Washington. Does the Government have land there that persons may lay claim to?" ALLEN B. RABY, Keokuk, Iowa

Reply, by Mr. Frank Winch:—It is believed that to a large extent the lands listed for entry under the homestead law have been entered, although it is known in some instances that home-

steads have later been abandoned because of the impracticability of maintaining agricultural homes thereon. Inquiries as to whether there are lands within the National Forests which have been listed for homestead entry and have not been entered, should be made to the United States Land Office, Washington, D. C.

The Forest Service offers under special use permit small tracts of from 1/5 to ½ acre in size each for the purpose of construction of Summer residences. These sites can be used the year around, if desired, but on account of climatic conditions, most of them are unsuited for anything except Summer occupancy. Lots of this kind are available practically everywhere in the National Forests where recreational opportunities create a demand for them.

Baseball

CURVES for a Canadian.

Request:—"Will you please tell me how to throw a curve?"

—BILL HILTS, Saskatchewan, Canada

Reply, by Mr. Fred Lieb:—Your question is technical and rather difficult to answer, as there are different ways of throwing curves. I believe Spaldings have books dealing with pitching which will give you something that you want; also Reach's of Philadelphia have a little pamphlet on pitching, which I think is free.

There are different grips for the throwing of curves, though a good way is to hold ball with thumb on bottom and index and middle fingers on top. To break the ball "in" snap the ball with the wrist toward the right as you come down in your delivery. To break it "out" reverse by giving your wrist a turn to the left. A good fast ball can be thrown by holding ball in all the fingers and coming down with it as you release ball from an overhand delivery, a sort of a snap just before throwing ball with maximum speed.

Medal

DECORATIONS that may not be exposed for sale.

Request:—"Could you advise me as to the approximate rarity and the commercial value to a collector of the United States Distinguished Service Cross and Distinguished Service Medal?"

—R. A. WEBB, San Francisco, California

Reply, by Mr. Howland Wood:—The United States Distinguished Service Medal is rare, as very few who had them awarded have parted with them. The Distinguished Service Cross is not so rare, but is by no means common. There is a law against exposing these far sale and, as they are of bronze, there is no hocking value to them. In fact, one never sees them in pawn shops and very seldom in dealers' hands.

Cartridge

IT'S the shell that does the damage when unconfined ammunition explodes.

Request:—"Could you tell me if it is possible for a person to be fatally wounded from a bullet exploding in a camp-fire?"

—ED. LISTER, JR., San Bernadino, California

Reply, by Mr. Donegan Wiggins:—I think that if hit in a vital portion of the body the explosion of a cartridge in an open fire might prove fatal.

The bullet does not seem to do the damage; it's the shell, this being lighter than the projectile, of course. If a powerful charge is thus fired, I think a hit by the shell in the temple or behind the ear, possibly over the heart, or on the abdomen, might cause death very easily.

I had one experience that has caused me to be very careful: Several of us lads, about thirty-one years since, were shooting at a shotgun shell in a field, standing about twenty yards from the shell, a good old brass case loaded with black powder. I hit the cap of the shell with a .22 short bullet from a little Winchester rifle, and it came back with terrific speed, and hit me just under the left arm, cutting through both shirt and undershirt, and giving me a very painful cut in the flesh over my ribs. I think that had it hit me in the head, some other man would be writing to you on this subject.

Dive

GETTING set for the plunge.

Request:—"How deep should the water be, on the average, when the diving board is about four feet from the top of the water?

When the boards are higher than six feet from the water, should the hands meet in point directly over the head, or spread out a little distance from the head?"

—NORMAN SPELLAR, Bloomfield, New Jersey

Reply, by Mr. L. de B. Handley:—Diving experts advocate a depth of at least seven feet at the place of entry under the four-foot springboard and not less than nine feet under the ten-foot board.

The standard entry for all head-first dives, regardless of height of take-off, is with hands above head and close together, thumbs touching. In high diving, in fact, it is advisable to lock the thumbs, in order to prevent the arms from being forced apart by the jar of striking the water.

Never-Never

AUSTRALIA'S "back blocks" and the "out back."

Request:—"Is the so-called never-never land of Australia a large or small desert? Are the native blacks hostile?"

—THOMAS ROGER, Binghamton, New York

Reply, by Mr. Alan Foley:—The never-never land is not a specific geographical region. Like the "back blocks" and "out back", the never-never is simply a general term for any little known parts of the Interior of Australia.

There is no considerable area of Australia which could be called entirely unexplored. But there are many thousands of square miles of Central and Northern Australia where the exploration has been of a very cursory nature.

So far as hostility from blacks is concerned, there is very little to fear. About one white man is killed every year by hostile blacks.

Generally speaking, the most hostile and warlike of our aboriginal warriors can be quickly subdued by the gift of a pinch of salt or tobacco.

Reno

WHERE a man may have a turn at the wheel.

Request:—"1. About how many casinos in and around Reno have roulette wheels?

2. Are these gambling resorts under State surveillance, and are the players protected?"

—PAUL GRUNOW, Bronx, New York

Reply, by Mr. F. W. Egelston:—1. There are probably 50 roulette wheels in and around Reno. There is no way to check up on the exact number, as they are merely classed as games, for licensing purposes. For example, the Bank casino has four in operation during the Summer months, and there are several other places in and around Reno nearly as large.

2. Gambling houses are operated under license. Players receive the same police protection as any other citizen.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelope and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.

2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **DO NOT** send questions to this magazine.

3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.

4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

A Complete list of the "Ask Adventure" experts appears in the issue of the fifteenth of each month

THE TRAIL AHEAD—THE NEXT ISSUE OF *ADVENTURE*, AUGUST 15th

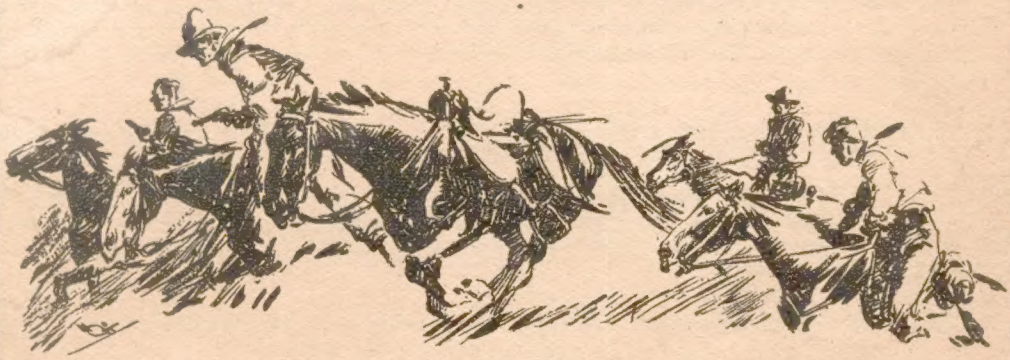
RED SKULL

By ARTHUR O. FRIEL

Beyond the jungled mountains dividing Venezuela from Brazil, directly south of Dead Man's Creek, *Terrill's* map indicated the place of the Red Skull, the gigantic ruddy stone in whose mysterious caverns reposed a fabulous cache of gold, diamonds, sapphires and rubies. And now his partner *Terrill* lay slain, the victim of the treacherous Indian guides; and *McGregor*, ex-Marine, found himself alone in the wilderness, with a goal that promised to be inescapable death . . . Begin this stirring three-part story in this issue.

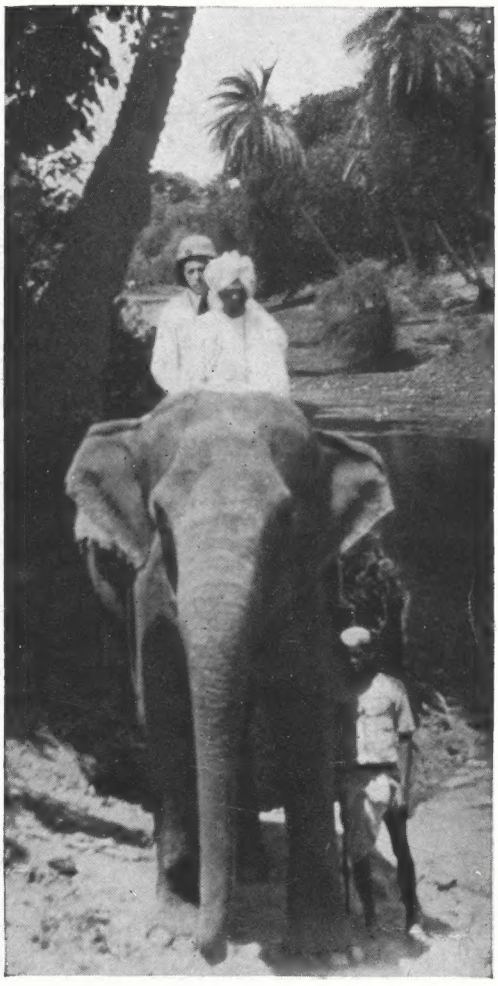
And~These Other Fine Stories

OVER PARIS, a story of the World War spies, by ARED WHITE; THESE MEN FLEW, a complete novel of the air, by ANDREW A. CAFFREY; DEATH AT MANDARIN CAP, a story of the South Sea Islands, by CAPTAIN FREDERICK MOORE; HIGHBALL ARTIST, a story of the railroad men, by WILLIAM EDWARD HAYES; Conclusion of WHITE TIGERS, a two-part story of India, by TALBOT MUNDY; PADDY THE DEVIL, a story of the North woods, by JAMES STEVENS; SKIPPER, M. D., an article about the ship's master as doctor to his crew, by CAPTAIN GEORGE H. GRANT; and EFFICIENCY, a story of the Old West, by W. C. TUTTLE.



L. G. BLOCHMAN

If all the miles he has travelled in the past twelve years were split in equal parts there would be enough to give every left handed child in the country a trolley ride. Started adventuring as a signal boy on the battleship *Oregon* . . barnstorming Japan, Korea, China and Borneo as a sleight-of-hand performer . . staff photographer of an English paper in Calcutta, he rolled about India on the trail of Viceroys, Hindu festivals, race horses, Moslem riots, Himalayan scenery, wild-animal buyers and snake charmers . . in Indore, the guest of Maharajah Holkar . . has slept under a mango tree in Benares, on a hatch cover of a Mohammedan pilgrim ship out of Jaffa and other unique places. Has never been to Iceland, but then he's still in his early thirties.



Imagine with what eagerness you and I would look forward to having him visit us for an evening to regale us with his stories of fantastic people and exotic places! But to some of your friends his name probably means not a thing. Let them in on our bi-monthly get-togethers in ADVENTURE where such men as Blochman spin their yarns. Send their names and addresses to ADVENTURE, 161 Sixth Avenue, New York, N. Y., and we will send each one of them a free copy of ADVENTURE to start them off on the trail that provides you and me with so much of keen enjoyment. ADVENTURE readers are a loyal crowd . . so let's not forget to let the other fellow in on it!

• • •

*Name*_____

*Address*_____

Adventure AC- 812

Coming

GREAT SERIALS

by

W. C. TUTTLE

ARTHUR O. FRIEL

WM. McLEOD RAINE

TALBOT MUNDY

GORDON YOUNG

M. WHEELER-NICHOLSON

•

LOOK FOR THEM!

in future issues

of

Adventure